

Fantastic Facts: The Supernatural in the Ethnographic Writings of Giraldus Cambrensis

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THESIS RATIONALE AND METHODOLOGY

I first discovered Gerald of Wales during my undergraduate studies at the University of Wales many years ago. After initially being less than enthusiastic I soon found myself captivated by his acerbic wit and unusual style. He was readable and fun, often rare commodities in medieval literature. He stands out from his contemporaries with no pretence at humility, and absolute belief in himself as an intellectual powerhouse. His arrogance is cited by many as a reason for dislike, yet personally I find his confidence and self-assuredness refreshing and part of his appeal.

The primary rationale behind this thesis is to explore concepts of Gerald's confused sense of identity within the context of his depictions of the supernatural in his Celtic ethnographic works, and I use the term 'supernatural' in its broadest sense. Although what we now classify as the supernatural was extremely common in medieval texts, I believe that Gerald's interest in the subject and his rationale behind his choice of vignette differ somewhat from the normal medieval fascination (whether consciously or, more likely, subconsciously). Contextually they can be read as part of the discourse into the dichotomy of Gerald's own sense of self. In these tales we see the conflict between 'Gerald the Celt', who was born and lived in a land still infused with a mythos from centuries gone by, and 'Gerald the Norman' noble trained in the rational, classical thinking of the Church. I chose his Celtic works because of their obvious relationship to Gerald himself; not only did they deal with cultures very close to Gerald but we also see his psyche rent apart. On the surface they are the work of Gerald the Norman cleric; rational, balanced, yet Gerald the Welshman looms large beneath the thin surface veneer. In these texts Gerald combines a seemingly jumbled mixture of history, ethnology, natural history and theology and their eminent readability allows for close analysis. Robert Bartlett considers that Gerald's reputation as an author rests upon his ethnographic works,¹ and I would not disagree. It is in these works that the man himself shines through the strongest as he inserts himself, as always, into the narrative.

In writing this thesis I had two specific goals in mind: to identify the supernatural or "unnatural" themes in Gerald's *Topographia Hiberniae*, *Itinerarium Kambriae* and the *Descriptio Kambriae*. I dismissed the *Expugnatio Hibernica* because the rationale behind the work was slightly different from the others although I used it as a secondary primary source. The *Topographia* is a mix of natural history and ethnographic report with frequent forays into the world of marvels and wonders; the *Itinerarium* is an account of Crusade preaching into which is stirred liberal pinches of the weird and wonderful, as well as Gerald's always forthright opinion; whereas the *Descriptio* is an examination of the Welsh people, their merits and foibles. The second aim was

¹ Robert Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales: A Voice of the Middle Ages*. Tempus Publishing Ltd. (Stroud, 2006), p. 147

to see how these themes and motifs exposed Gerald's dualist internal nature and illuminated his sense of self identity. What was the rationale behind the inclusion of these themes and motifs? What was their correspondence, if any, with the internal conflicts within Gerald himself?

Aside from Gerald's work I used other medieval texts as supporting primary sources, where they proved to provide additional information. Some of the supporting primary texts, or at least earlier redactions of them, were obviously used as source material by Gerald himself, or at least use the same sources. I also made use of anthologies of early Irish and Welsh myths to cross-check certain subject matter, as Gerald makes many mentions of the folkloric beliefs of the medieval inhabitants of these countries. Although both Ireland and Wales were nominally Christian at the time, it was a Christianity fused with remnants of ancient pagan beliefs and still differed significantly from Rome, beliefs which have continued on to this day in the form of folklore. The Celtic lands have always straddled a cultural and spiritual divide that many would argue they still do today, with folk traditions still being important parts of their modern cultural landscapes. Gerald, being half Norman and half Welsh, also straddled this cultural divide, and many of the vignettes included in these narratives can be seen as belonging very much to an earlier, pagan, time.

In terms of secondary works, I relied heavily on the work of Robert Bartlett, renowned Gerald scholar; his insight into the man was invaluable. Caroline Walker Bynum's work on the concept of wonder also provided a strong conceptual framework as did various contemporary examinations of the idea of monstrousness in the medieval period. I drew on a wide diversity of source material, from analysis of Welsh folklore and fairy beliefs to saints' lives to try and tackle the essence of Gerald, his subconscious motivations and the culture in which he wrote.

ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to answer the question of what role supernatural themes and motifs played in allowing us a glimpse into Gerald of Wales' sense of dualist identity. He is revered by many modern Welsh scholars as an early Welsh nationalist, even though Gerald did not always see himself that way, yet his life's work was his battle for an independent Welsh see. I begin with a general discursive review of historiography in general and the various sub-genres by which Gerald's work could be classified, followed, after a brief biography of Gerald himself, by a more detailed examination of the philosophical and theological classifications of the very meaning of the words 'natural' and 'supernatural' and how the two related to each other. With this contextual framework established specific examples from Gerald's works are examined in greater depth, concluding with a discussion on the medieval definition of the 'Other' which, I believe was the key to understanding Gerald's narratives and ultimately the man himself.

INTRODUCTION

Giraldus Cambrensis, more commonly known to the modern reader by the moniker Gerald of Wales by virtue of his Cambrian birthplace, was a unique man; a scholar in an era often regarded as bleak in the field of intellectual endeavour and profoundly *uncritical* writing. What sets him apart from his peers was not so much his prodigious literary output, although this was truly remarkable, but his ability to speak in his own inimitable voice. Egotistical, opinionated, conservative, yet also radical on occasion it is fitting that William T Holmes (1936) would write of him: “there are not many clerks of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries who stand out clearly as personalities. I find myself thinking of Giraut de Barri, or Gerald the Welshman, as a twelfth-century Pepys.”² For, above all else, Gerald was a brilliant story teller, “...a narrator rather than a historian”,³ although “...most medieval storytellers, whether they billed themselves as observers and records of events or as entertainers...understood full well the value of telling a good story.”⁴ Gerald however excelled, in almost a contemporary, journalistic way. Through his writings he sought to enlighten his readers on various subjects, whether it is the behaviour of princes or the natural history of little known realms, as well as to entertain them. There is little of the usual medieval literary dryness here, but wit and the outpouring of a lively, inquisitive mind. Some of his information was erroneous, but he tells us himself that he never consciously sought to misinform. He is liked and loathed, in seemingly equal measure, by scholars but, and perhaps this is the most important aspect for any writer, his work does not illicit indifference. He is a writer who has consistently made an impression on academics and is eminently readable even today. He stands out from the throng, his personality giving his work a particular resonance. This makes him and his work an interesting, if complex, subject.

Medieval ethnographic writing is a complex area of study. Writers of the time did not conform to the rigorous standards that modern scholars must adhere to and so their narratives differed very little from the fiction of the day except in terms of purpose. They wrote with an unbounded enthusiasm and bias and what seems to us now to be a rather tenuous hold on reality. The natural and the purely fantastical were promiscuously interwoven and trying to decipher one from the other can be problematic at best and often proves to be impossible. Gerald of Wales was no better or no worse than his contemporaries although his prose was perhaps more lively and his style more invigorating, and he did perhaps have a more empathic feel for the natural world than many. The modern reader finds themselves often incredulous at the marvels and wonders which Gerald encounters on his travels; were there really islands where death held no sway, talking

² William T. Holmes, Gerald the Naturalist. *Speculum*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Jan. 1936), pp. 110 – 121, p. 110

³ Internet reference: <http://www.newadvent.org> – Catholic Encyclopedia *Giraldus Cambrensis*, ref. October 28, 2006

⁴ Suzanne Fleischman, On the Representation of History and Fiction in the Middle Ages, *History and Theory*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (October 1983), pp. 278-310, p. 280

wolves, magical wells? Probably not, at least not from a rational, modern perspective, but medieval narratives cannot be read literally. Gerald drew extensively on local folklore, superstitions, and old pagan religion and mythology, as did many of his fellows. Did he believe many of these tales? It is hard to say as such beliefs were commonplace, although he did write with a strong sense of skepticism that was definitely refreshingly different from the norm. However, the generally accepted view of the times was that strange creatures and events were deemed to have been created by God like everything else that existed⁵, and the barrier between the natural and supernatural worlds was very thin; the marvelous was seen as possible as the prosaic.

Historical narratives can be interpreted, like other narrative forms, by the tools of literary criticism; they are “significant symbolic structures”. As such, they impart various kinds of conventional meanings which are projected upon the events contained within the narrative itself.⁶ Gerald’s writings tell us a great deal about him as a man as well as the events he is reporting. Within the larger genre of historiography, Gerald’s Welsh and Irish works, especially the *Itinerarium Kambriae*, conforms in many ways to the travel narrative rather than ethnography in a classical sense. The travel narrative came out of the Arab world where, as early as the tenth century, it was deemed to be a separate literary genre.⁷ According to Zumthor and Peebles, the travel narrative:

...drew on the encyclopedic tradition of the ancient world known as paradoxology – the collection of oddities (including monsters or hybrids, distant races, marvelous lands) – and antique notions of portents or omens – that is, unusual events that foreshadowed the (usually catastrophic) future and were accompanied by a vague sense of dread.⁸

Historiography itself uses concepts of the past and “historical consciousness” which are “determined by the present” and these discourses “create the actuality of history.”⁹ Medieval historiography was almost exclusively concerned with politics and the “...activities of the leading classes”.¹⁰ Now however, medieval historiography is a much scorned subject with scholars citing a litany of faults. Most medieval historians were members of the clergy and their work was philosophically allied with theology; rhetoric often made them inimical to the truth; people and events were used to illustrate moral teaching, often confusing the reader with allegory.¹¹ These devices were deemed more important than actually conveying historical facts to their readers. Added to these contextual problems is the fact that most are also narratively

⁵ C C Oman, ‘The English Folklore of Gervase of Tilbury’, *Folklore*, Vol. 55, No. 1 (Mar., 1944), pp. 2 – 15, p. 3

⁶ Joan N Radner, ‘Writing History: Early Irish Historiography and the Significance of Form’, *Celtica* 23, (1999), pp. 312 – 325, p. 312

⁷ Paul Zumthor & Catherine Peebles, ‘The Medieval Travel Narrative’, *New Literary History*, Vol. 25, No. 4, 25th Anniversary Issue (Part 2) (Autumn, 1994), pp. 809 – 824, p. 809

⁸ Caroline Bynum Walker, ‘Wonder’, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 102, No. 1 (Feb., 1997), pp. 1 – 26, p. 12

⁹ Hans-Werner Goetz, ‘Historical Consciousness and Institutional Concern in European Medieval Historiography (Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Gabrielle M. Spiegel, Genealogy: Form and Function in Medieval Historical Narrative. *History and Theory*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Feb. 1983), pp. 43 – 53, p. 43

unintelligible. Evidence is lacking and “propagandistic intentions” which makes the texts “...inauthentic, unscientific, unreliable, ahistorical, irrational, borderline illiterate and ...unprofessional.”¹² But this is only true if we view them as ‘histories’ as we perceive ‘histories’ to be. If we view them as both literature *and* history, then they can be seen in a different, not so negative and unflattering, light.¹³

Writers of history in the Middle Ages relied on sources that few historians today would consider valid or useful. (Of course, there are contemporary historians that use sources that are doubtful at best; this sin is certainly not just confined to medieval writers.) Myth and legend, as well as earlier works, formed the bulk of their source material with no attempt to ascertain whether they were reliable or accurate. Gerald’s work needs to be read with the idea of literature *and* history in mind. Some of his sources *were* fictional. Although he himself believed his work to be factual, and to a large extent they are, there is an undeniable blending of fiction and fantasy. Often it is this latter aspect that makes them so eminently readable. In the *Topographia Hibernica* he describes the birds of Ireland:

Falcons derive their name from a sickle (falce), because they whirl their flight in a circle; gerfalcons are so called from their gyrations (gyrofaciendo); sparrow hawks (nisi), from their swoop (nisu); and hawks (accipitres) from their greed of prey (accipiendo).¹⁴

Wright dryly observes in his notes to the text, “it may be right to remark that most of these derivations are more fanciful than correct.”¹⁵ We do not know where Gerald derived these ‘facts’ from, but much medieval zoological knowledge was taken from bestiaries, “...conventional literature of a pious sort.”¹⁶ There were also serious studies of natural history, Vincent of Beauvais produced the *Speculum naturale*, Bartholomew the English wrote the *De proprietatibus rerum* and Albert the Great wrote the *De animalibus*.¹⁷ As Gerald’s descriptions vary in accuracy it is highly possible that he used scientifically based sources as well as the fanciful bestiaries. Dubious science was not restricted to fauna, it encompassed all branched of scientific knowledge. In the *Topographia* Gerald compares Ireland with a hypothetical East:

Besides all the more common annoyances which abound in these regions, the safety of man is threatened and endangered by swift panthers of various kinds; by rhinoceroses, allured by love of virgins;¹⁸ crocodiles, fearful by their breath; hippopotami frequenting the rivers; lynxes, with piercing eyes; and lions that fear nothing but the hyænas’ urine. The country is infested by asps and vipers, by dragons, and by the basilisk, whose very glance is fatal.

¹² *Ibid*, p. 44

¹³ *Ibid*

¹⁴ The Topography of Ireland, Trans. Thomas Forester. Revised and Ed. Thomas Wright. In parentheses Publications, Medieval Latin Series, Cambridge, Ontario 2000, Distinction I, Chap. 8 p. 17

¹⁵ *Ibid*. note 38

¹⁶ Holmes, 1936, p. 111. Some examples of medieval bestiaries are; Philippe de Thaün’s *Bestiaire*, Guillaume de Normandie’s *Bestiaire divin*, Gervaise’s *Livre des bestes*, the pseudo-Jacques de Vitry’s *Bestiaire moralisé*, Richard de Fournival’s *Bestiaire d’Amour*, the Italian *Bestiario moralizzato*, the *Livre dou Tresor* of Brunetto Latini, the *Acerba* of Cecco d’Ascoli, the pseudo-Hugh of Saint-Victor’s *Liber de bestiis et aliis rebus*, and the Old English *Physiologus*. (Author’s notes)

¹⁷ *Ibid*.

¹⁸ This is a reference to the unicorn which, according to medieval fable, was hunted using virgins as a lure.

It is infested by the 'seps', a little reptile whose malignity makes up for its diminutive size. Its venom not only wastes the flesh, but the very bones.¹⁹

This negative, and not very accurate, portrayal was a typical piece of medieval theological propaganda. The East was the epitome of all that was base and evil in the church's eyes in the Middle Ages, and in many ways still is; Islam then, as now, was considered a scourge. (The concept of the East and the 'Other' will be discussed in chapter five.) Pope Urban II had called for the First Crusade at the Council of Clermont in 1095²⁰, and Gerald himself was a successful preacher for the cause of the Third Crusade as recorded in *Itinerarium Kambriae*.²¹

Of the intermediate sources that Gerald relied upon he particularly used *florilegia* (from the Lat. *florilegium*, 'an anthology').²² Drawing on these and his own wide knowledge of classical writers, he used techniques in adapting quotes from other authors taught in the schools of the *ars dictaminis*.²³ Often moral points were highlighted by quotations from classical authors, and Gerald was especially fond of using them to illustrate his own literary craftsmanship and philosophy. An example of Gerald's use of classical quotes is his in explanation of people from northern climes being more warlike than those from warmer latitudes:

Nascitur indomitus bellis, et martis amator;

Gens hæc ingentes animos ingenti corpore versant.²⁴

Unfortunately Gerald does not attribute this quote to a specific author, but his works are peppered with similar extracts. The lines between fact and fiction are further blurred by this liberal use of quotation and poetry. They serve to establish medieval historiography as a narrative in its own right rather than merely as a means of conveying facts.

As one has to erase the lines between medieval historical writing and literature, it is perhaps helpful to look at the former within the context of a literary framework. The two mainstays of medieval literature were the epic and the romance. Hans-Robert Jauss distinguished between the two using certain criteria, one being "...the degree of historicity which the purveyors and the consumers of medieval texts attached to their subject matter."²⁵ Nichols tells us about "...a space between the discourse of epic and that of romance...that epic and romance predict a tension between the real space and time of medieval culture which they choose *not* to represent and the

¹⁹ *Topographia*, Dis. I, Chap. 26, p. 30

²⁰ James Harvey Robinson ed. *Readings in European History*, vol. I (Boston: Ginn 1904) pp. 314 - 317

²¹ The incentive to fight in the Crusades was not merely for one to gain a sense of moral righteousness; when Urban II called for the First Crusade he also granted the first 'plenary' indulgence – any Christian who confessed and then went on the Crusade received a remission of all punishment in the material world and in the state of Purgatory. From Andrew McCall, *The Medieval Underworld*. Barnes and Noble 1993 p. 37

²² A. A. Goddu; R. H. Rouse, Gerald of Wales and the *Florilegium Angelicum*. *Speculum*, Vol. 52, No. 3 (July 1977), pp. 488 – 521, pp. 488 - 9

²³ Goddu; Rouse 1977, pp. 489 - 90

²⁴ Is born to war, and filled with martial fire-
So here brave souls gigantic frames inspire.

²⁵ Fleischman 1983, p. 278

concerns of philosophical anthropology which they *do* portray.”²⁶ In this void there exists a genre “...that acknowledges the presence of both genres, and yet which focuses squarely on the problematic space-time of its own present.”²⁷ Gerald of Wales exists in this space, and we will see that he drew upon both epic and romance yet also created his own style that was unique to him, although there are parallels between his work and other genres as we will see. Words and their position relative to one another was what were important to Gerald. He held great store in their power to impart knowledge and information. He “...conceives of the act of writing and reception as part of a continuum involving intellect and affect:

Auctores siquidem elegantium verborum, non auditors tantum, repertores non recitores, dixerium laude dignissimos. Curiam autem, et Logicam, tam in alliciendo, quam in vix deserendo persimiles invenies. Dialecticae tamen notitiam, tanquam aliarum omnium tam scientiarum quam atrium acumen, cum moderamine morae inculpatae, certum est esse perutilem: curiam vero, nisi blandis solum palponibus et ambitiosis, non necessarium.²⁸

As we have previously discussed, medieval histories can be confusing and almost unreadable affairs, just a litany of events and people with no real attempt at trying to bring them to life. Gerald cannot be accused of being ‘borderline illiterate’ as many were. He infused his writing with vitality, combining rhetorical skill with visual imagery. He brought his subject to life and draws the reader in. This was achieved by his use of words and their relation to one another, even if he did veer from factuality on occasion. In the view of historians of historiography both the annals and the chronicle were flawed “...in that they lack a narrative dimension.”²⁹ Histories gain meaning and explanatory effect by adding this, by “making stories out of mere chronicles...the encoding of the historical facts of the chronicle as components of specific kinds of plot structures.”³⁰ Gerald’s works are collections of stories held together by a framework rather than a narrative as a whole. People, creatures, and events are the narrative’s lifeblood, although he also used allegorical devices. Descriptions of individuals also pepper the narratives, and add a lively tone.

²⁶ Nichols 1986, p. 21

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ For myself I would have said that those who can string sentences together in a pleasing way are much to be admired, not the listeners merely, not those who have occasion to repeat what is written by others but the actual writers. You will find that the language of royal courts and that of the schools have many points in common, designed as they both are first to attract your attention and then to hold it. There is no doubt at all that a skill in dialectics is of the greatest use, a shrewd assembling and appreciation, as it were, of all the other arts and sciences, but only when employed with the control and moderation that become perfect by practice. In itself courtly language is not all that necessary, except for suave syncophants and men of great ambition.

(*Itinerarium Cambriae*. “Praefatio Prima”; Thorpe, 66) Quoted by Nichols. 1986: pp. 25-6

²⁹ Fleischman 1983, p. 284

³⁰ Fleischman 1983, p. 293, referencing Hayden White, “The Historical Text as Literary Artifact”, 83 f., *Metahistory* 7-11

The relationship between fiction and history occurs again and again when examining Gerald's work because of the way in which he constructs his narrative. The fictional elements, whether Gerald knew them to be so or it was unintentional, reinforce what he is trying to say, and accentuate the factual. Gerald himself was the product of two disparate worlds; the Norman and the Welsh; the overlords and the conquered. This produced a schism in the man, a division of his loyalties which plagued him throughout his life. This is discernable in his work. There is an obvious understanding of the cultural makeup of the inhabitants of Ireland and Wales, an empathy with their superstitious beliefs, yet he also tries to maintain his façade of superiority (if it is a façade, but his praise of the inhabitants of Wales leads one to believe that he had a real respect for them, their independence and their struggles.) We think of him now as a Welshman, but he was schooled in the Norman tradition, finishing his education in Paris and entering the church, that bastion of medieval intellectualism, and his family background was more Norman than Welsh. His work occupied a space between these two facets of himself; between the French influenced romance and the prose narrative tradition firmly rooted in the British Isles which spread throughout Northern Europe in the tenth century. In his use of narrative, of "the story", a similarity is discernable between his work and the later Icelandic sagas. This similarity was no accident but the result of a common culture. "All northern people were accustomed to tell stories (*sagen*). The style, the humour of the saga is borrowed from the *märchen* (fairy-tale). The story (*sage*) treats only a single episode in the life of the hero. The *märchen* and the saga...narrate the whole life of the hero in a series of episodes."³¹ Not that Gerald wrote fairy-tales (although he *did* write of fairies), but rather his work was a series of episodes as we have already seen. Gerald came from this northern tradition, as can be seen in the early Welsh sagas, on which the *Mabinogion* was based. In the medieval world, the northern nations were in many ways similar. They existed on the periphery of Europe, removed from the 'civilized' world, and retained ties to their pagan past, although diffused by their conversion to Christianity. This past found echoes in their literature: the Norse gods in the sagas, the Celtic gods in the *Mabinogion* and the Irish Mythology Cycle. Some of Gerald's tales have been found to contain descriptions that bear a resemblance to stories from Celtic mythology. Gerald draws on Irish mythology for the early history of Ireland in *Topographia Hibernica*. According to Bugge, the British Isles was where the "...oral saga-narration originated between 950 and 1000 in the Viking settlements."³² By the time Gerald was writing the saga-narration tradition had filtered into the mainstream of British writing. The Viking saga were influenced by the Celtic tales, and "...in Wales heroic tales had from primitive times the form of prose narrative."³³ One could argue that *Itinerarium Kambriæ* was a peculiar kind of heroic tale, adhering as it does to the accepted style of narratives about crusade preaching. It "...projects an ideology onto the form of the work and the space-time in which it takes place"³⁴, the ideology of the crusades as the heroic focal point. The *Itinerarium* was a literary form in its own right by the twelfth century, a form "...with almost a millennial association with the Holy Land."³⁵ The values in the actions are more important, more celebrated, than the "historical or documentary interest".³⁶ When we consider the *Itinerarium Kambriæ* these actions form the bias of the text, reinforced by the historical and documentary,

³¹ Alexander Bugge, The Origin and Credibility of the Icelandic Saga. *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (Jan. 1909) pp. 249-261, pp. 251-2

³² Bugge, 1909: p. 261

³³ Bugge, 1909: p. 255

³⁴ Nichols 1986: p. 32

³⁵ *ibid.*

³⁶ Fleischman 1983, p. 286

but the core of them is the story. Gerald's work is less simplistic than the later Icelandic works, infused as it is with his Norman education and ecclesiastical background, but the influence of the prose tradition is very apparent. *Topographia Hibernica* and the *Expugnatio Hibernica* are Irish sagas, whereas *Itinerarium Kambriæ* and *Descriptio Kambriæ* are sagas of Wales. Consider the following passage from *Expugnatio Hibernica*:

Dermotius [Dermot], returning through Great Britain, loaded with honorable gifts by the royal munificence, but encouraged more by hope for the future than any aid he had yet obtained, reached at last the noble town of Bristol. Here he sojourned for some time, making a liberal expenditure, as on account of the ships which made frequent voyages from Ireland to that port, he had opportunities of hearing the state of affairs in his own country and among his people. During his stay he caused the royal letters patent to be read several times in public, and made liberal offers of pay and lands to many persons, but in vain. At length, however, Richard, surnamed Strongbow, earl of Strigul, the son of earl Gilbert, came and had a conference with him; and after a prolonged treaty it was agreed between them that in the ensuing spring the earl should lend him aid in recovering his territories, Dermotius [Dermot] solemnly promising to give him his eldest daughter for wife, with the succession to his kingdom.³⁷

Compare this with a passage in Egil's Saga, a story that spans one hundred and fifty years and is set against a framework of King Harald Fair-Hair's unification of the country:

King Harald mounted expedition, assembling a fleet of warships and gathering troops from all over the country, then left Trondheim and headed south. He had heard that a great army had been gathered in Adger and Rogaland and Hordaland, mustered far and wide from the inland regions and Vik, with which many men of rank intended to defend their land against him.³⁸

The latter passage is more simplistic, yet the similarity in style, based on a common tradition, is obvious.

The medieval epic singer in effect disappears behind his narrative, whose meaning is straightforward, immediately accessible, and generally unambiguous.³⁹ This narrative distance is "...a mark of fictional discourse or "the discourse of the imaginary" and narrative immediacy...a mark of historical discourse or "the discourse of the real""⁴⁰ and the latter is present in many of the chronicles.⁴¹ Yet Gerald does not follow these rules. He does not disappear behind his narrative; he "...weaves himself into the interior and exterior of the text...figuring himself as grammatical and rhetorical subject, author and actor, exemplum and gloss."⁴² Gerald uses this "subjective and objective persona"⁴³ to good effect in *Itinerarium Kambriæ*. Crusade preaching was far more than a recruitment tool for armed forces, but "...a socio-religious act reasserting the power of monologic discourse."⁴⁴ Wales and Palestine are both placed within the context of sacred spaces; language and content follow rules necessary for order. Justification of war was an

³⁷ Internet reference: Medieval Source Book, Gerald of Wales, The Norman Conquest of Ireland, ref. 3/11/06

³⁸ The Sagas of the Icelanders, Viking (NY) 2000, chap. 9, p. 17

³⁹ Fleischman 1983, p. 295

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁴² Nichols 1990: p. 31

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ Nichols 1990: p. 33

important part of the epic model, and the *Itinerarium* was precisely that: a sacred justification for combat.⁴⁵

But, essentially Gerald was a journalist, using narrative to describe events, places and people for the entertainment of his readers. He is endeavouring to educate his readers not merely to entertain them. “He is the most “modern” as well as the most voluminous of all medieval writers.”⁴⁶ Theodore Watts-Dunton places him in a triumvirate of “the great recrudescence of Cymric energy”; Geoffrey of Monmouth; Walter Map; and Gerald of Wales.⁴⁷ Gerald was an admirer of Map, but regarded Geoffrey of Monmouth as a writer of myth rather than fact. Kate Norgate estimated Gerald’s place within the realm of English letters and intellectuals:

Gerald’s wide range of subjects is only less remarkable than the ease and freedom with which he treats them. Whatever he touches – history, archaeology, geography, natural science, politics, the social life and thought of the day, the physical peculiarities of Ireland and the manners and customs of its people, the picturesque scenery and traditions of his own native land, the scandals of the court and the cloister, the petty struggle for the primacy of Wales, and the great tragedy of the fall of the Angevin Empire – is all alike dealt with in the bold, dashing, offhand style of a modern newspaper or magazine article. His first important work, the ‘Topography of Ireland’, is, with due allowance for the difference between the tastes of the twelfth century and those in the nineteenth, just such a series of sketches as a special correspondent in our day might send...to satisfy or whet the curiosity of his readers at home.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Nichols 1990: p. 33 & 36

⁴⁶ *Itinerary Through Wales*, Project Gutenberg etext. David Price 1997 from J. M. Dent ed. 1912, introduction.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

CHAPTER ONE

GIRALDUS CAMBRENSIS:

A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF AN EXTRAORDINARY LIFE

Before we examine Gerald's literary work in any greater depth, it will be useful to gain a little background on the man himself as he was as, if not more, complex than his work. He was a man of multiple dimensions; poet, journalist, clergyman, courtier. He often seemed to be a creature of contradictions and his work often betrayed his obviously confused sense of identity. He was born around 1146 at Manorbier Castle in Pembrokeshire, the youngest son of William de Barri, a Norman knight, and Angharad the daughter of Gerald de Windsor. In reality he was not very Welsh at all, just one quarter on his mother's side, her mother being Nest (or Nesta) the daughter of Rhys ap Iurddur, Lord of South Wales, one of the three main indigenous kingdoms in Wales (the others being Gwynedd and Powys). Yet in many ways his Welshness formed the dominant part of his genealogy, and was the part of him which would shape his life and achievements. William de Barri "...was one of the most powerful of the Welsh nobility at the time."⁴⁹ Gerald was definitely a member of the medieval ruling elite. At the time Anglo-Norman and Angevin England was in a state of flux, with the separation between the aristocracy, *nobiles*, and knights, *milites* that existed before the eleventh century becoming less distinct.⁵⁰ The de Barri's were members of the nobility, but the shifting of power and influence would affect Gerald personally in years to come. Gerald was schooled in Paris, returning to England c. 1172 where he was employed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, undertaking ecclesiastical missions in Wales. Eventually he was appointed Archdeacon of Brecknock. David Fitzgerald, his uncle, the Bishop of St. David's, died in 1176 and the chapter submitted Gerald's name to Henry II. The king rejected this recommendation and instead appointed one of his Norman retainers. Henry "...saw that his settled policy in Wales would be overturned"⁵¹ by Gerald's appointment. Wales was a sensitive area, the inhabitants were not generally welcoming of their English overlords, and Gerald's family had significant power there:

Gerald's cousin, the Lord Rhys, had been appointed the king's justiciar in South Wales. The power of the Lord Marches was to be kept in check by a quasi-alliance between the Welsh Prince and his overlord. The election of Gerald to the greatest see in Wales would upset the balance of power. David Fitz-Gerald, a good easy man (*vir sua*

⁴⁹ Internet reference: <http://www.newadvent.org> – Catholic Encyclopedia *Giraldus Cambrensis*, ref. October 28, 2006

⁵⁰ Ralph V. Turner, Changing Perceptions of the New Administrative Class in Anglo-Norman and Angevin England: The Curiales and Their Conservative Class. *The Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (April 1990), pp. 93-117, p. 98, referencing Joseph R. Strayer, "The Two Levels of Feudalism" in *Life and Thought in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Robert S. Hoyt (Minneapolis 1967), pp. 57-65; also Georges Duby, "Une enquête à poursuivre: La noblesse dans la France médiévale," *Revue Historique* 226 (1961): 1-22.

⁵¹ Baldwin's Itinerary Through Wales, Project Gutenberg etext. David Price 1997 from J. M. Dent ed. 1912

sorte contentus in Gerald's description of him), the king could tolerate, but he could not contemplate without uneasiness the combination of spiritual and political power in South Wales in the hands of two able, ambitious, and energetic kinsmen, such as he knew Gerald and the Lord Rhys to be.⁵²

Gerald's reaction to Henry's decision was to return to his studies in Paris for four years, finally returning to Wales in 1180. Retreat into study was to become an oft relied upon reaction to disappointment for the rest of his life. He received an appointment by the Bishop of St. David's, which he soon relinquished. In 1183 the king employed him to "...settle terms between him and the rebellious Lord Rhys" and, perhaps as a reward for his successful diplomatic mission, but most probably to keep "so dangerous a character" from turbulent Wales, Gerald was made a Court chaplain in 1184.⁵³ He was sent to accompany Prince John on his expedition to Ireland in 1184. It was on this journey that *Topographia Hibernica* and *Expugnatio Hibernica* were written. This work is often criticized, but Gerald was only drawing on the current Neo-Platonic moralistic philosophy to explain "the specific racial differences he encountered among his Irish contemporaries,"⁵⁴ and therefore, although obviously prejudiced from a modern viewpoint, they should be seen in the context of the time. All writers are products of their spatial and chronological environment and Gerald is merely reflecting the wider belief system in place at the time.

In 1188 he accompanied Archbishop Baldwin to Wales, preaching the Third Crusade. Crusade preaching was an established recruiting tool; a rousing preacher could prevail upon many of their listeners to take the Cross and sign up to fight. Gerald was enormously successful in this regard. In his autobiography, *De rebus a se gestis*, Gerald describes examples, with his usual lack of modesty, "...of the mystical powers" of the second crusade preaching of Saint Bernard, as well as his own in Wales⁵⁵:

Praeterea pro re Miranda multi ducebant et obstruebant, cum archidiaconus lingua tantum Gallica loqueretur et Latina, quod non minus vulgares qui neutram linguam noverant, quam caeteri ad verbum ipsius flebant innumeri, et ad cruces signaculum plures quam ducenti concurrebant. Simile contigit in Alemannia de beato Bernardo; qui verbum Domini Teutonicis faciens lingua Gallica, quam penitus ignorabant, tantum eis devotionem incussit et compunctionem, ut et ab oculis eorum lacrimarum affluentiam, et ad cuncta quae suadebat vel facienda vel credenda facillime cordium eorum duritiam emolliret; cum tamen ad interpretis sermonem eis lingua sua fideliter exponentis nihil omnino moti fuissent...Unde et finito sermone, cum archidiaconus, qui stando locutus fuerat, se in sessione reciperet, vir quidam hospitalaris qui prope consederat, divit ei verbum istud: "Vere Spiritus Sanctus hodie manifeste locutus est ore vestro".⁵⁶

⁵² *ibid.*

⁵³ *ibid.*

⁵⁴ James Cain, 'Unnatural History: Gender and Genealogy in Gerald of Wales' *Topographia Hibernica. Essays in Medieval Studies* 19 (2002), pp. 29 – 43, p. 30

⁵⁵ Nichols 1986, p. 33 - 34

⁵⁶ (*De rebus*, 2, 18, 76; Butler, 101) Nichols, 1986, p.34: Moreover, many were amazed that, though the archdeacon spoke only *French and Latin*, the common people who knew neither tongue wept in untold numbers no less than the rest and more than two hundred ran all together to receive the sign of the Cross. The like also befell in Germany in the case of the blessed Bernard who, *speaking to the Germans in the French tongue of which they were totally ignorant*, filled them with such devotion and compunction, that he called forth floods of tears from their eyes and with the greatest ease softened the hardness of their hearts so they did and believed all that he told them; *and yet*

In the 1190s Gerald again resumed his long fight to become Bishop of St. David's, prompted by the death of Bishop Peter de Leia in 1198. It was a fight that Gerald would ultimately lose; Gerald was supported by the Welsh chieftains but King John backed the Archbishop of Canterbury, despite an interview with Pope Innocent III where he tried to convince Rome of St. David's autonomy from Canterbury. *De jure Menevensis Ecclesiae* was written in connection with this endeavour. Gerald's trip to Rome to plead his case was his last big adventure and the last chapter in this long, drawn out drama which defined Gerald in many ways. He devoted his final twenty years to literary endeavours but certainly did not become a shrinking violet, as he rode as a pilgrim to Rome. But his declining years were spent mostly quietly amongst the books he loved and he died in 1224 when he was almost eighty years old.⁵⁷

Gerald was not a one note author, he wrote on a very wide range of subjects. Professor Brewer, who edited Gerald's work for the Rolls series, described him thus:

Geography, history, ethics, divinity, canon law, biography, natural history, epistolary correspondence, and poetry employed his pen by turns, and in all these departments of literature he has left memorials of his ability.⁵⁸

Naturally, as one would expect from a man as gregarious and extrovert, Gerald had his flaws. One of his less appealing traits is his anti-Semitism. Christian anti-Semitism had its roots in the beginnings of the church. When Rome became the home of the church, the Romans sought to downplay their role in the crucifixion of Christ and therefore shifted the blame to the Jews. Arguments over whether the church should practice strict observance of Mosaic Law, the decision that the New Testament superseded it, the reinterpretation of certain passages in the Old Testament to reinforce anti-Jewish sentiment and the Jewish reaction in the *Book of the Generations of Jesus*, all planted the seeds of medieval anti-Semitism.⁵⁹ Such prejudice was not an unusual thing in Gerald's time and Gerald should not necessarily be castigated for it. Less than a hundred years after his death the 1290 Edict of Expulsion expelled English Jews from England for nearly four hundred years. This was preceded by Gregory IX's 1231 finalization of the Inquisition "...determined by the unwillingness of the Papacy to allow Frederick II a completely free hand in applying his drastic legislation against heresy,"⁶⁰ even though the Inquisition did not really take off until later. Here we have Gerald's opinion of a monk who converted to Judaism:

A certain monk of the same order, or rather a certain demoniac in our own times, being as it were tired of the Catholic faith and worn out with the sweet and light burden of Christ's yoke, and scorning, at the instigation of the

when an interpreter faithfully set forth to them in their own tongue everything that he said, they were not at all moved thereat... Wherefore at the sermon's close, when the Archdeacon [i.e. Gerald] sat down again, a certain Hospitaller who sat near him said to him, 'In truth, the Holy Spirit has manifestly spoken by your mouth this day'.

⁵⁷ Thorpe, intro. *Itinerarium/Descriptio* (1978), pp. 22 - 23

⁵⁸ *Itinerary Through Wales*, Project Gutenberg etext. David Price 1997 from J. M. Dent ed. 1912, introduction.

⁵⁹ Andrew McCall, *The Medieval Underworld*. Barnes and Noble (NY) 1993, pp. 259 - 260

⁶⁰ Christopher Dawson, *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*. Doubleday & Co. (Garden City, NY) 1958, p. 209

devil, any longer to walk in the way of salvation. . . . as if phrenetic and mad, and truly turned to insanity, fleeing to the synagogue of Satan. And to cut short the whole wretched story which we have dilated upon at great length to show our detestation, at last he caused himself to be circumcised with the Jewish rite, and as a most vile apostate joined himself, to his damnation to the enemies of the cross of Christ.⁶¹

Misogynism was also a very 'normal' prejudice during the Middle Ages, especially amongst the clergy, and the status of women was very low. But Gerald is more vitriolic than most, and one does get the feeling that Gerald's negative feelings about women were more deeply felt. In *Itinerarium Cambriae* he describes the actions of Rhys, son of Gruffydd, prince of South Wales, after the sermon in Radnor on Ash Wednesday 1188 when he took the Cross. Gerald focuses all the blame for Rhys' apparent change of heart on his wife, rather than acknowledging that Rhys himself may have had second thoughts after the fervour of Gerald's preaching had worn off (not an uncommon occurrence):

Rhys himself was so fully determined upon the holy peregrination, as soon as the archbishop should enter his territories on his return, that for nearly fifteen days he was employed with great solicitude in making the necessary preparations for so distant a journey; till his wife, and, according to the common vicious licence of the country, his relation in the fourth degree, Guendolena (Gwenllian), daughter of Madoc, prince of Powys, by female artifices diverted him wholly from his noble purpose.⁶²

Gerald was also vain, conceited and full of a sense of self-importance and found a way of inevitably inserting himself into his narratives:

Gerald was satisfied, not only with his birthplace and lineage, but with everything that was his. He makes complacent references to his good looks, which he inherited from Princess Nesta. "Is it possible so fair a youth can die?" asked Bishop, afterwards Archbishop Baldwin, when he saw him in his student days.⁶³

In his first preface to *Descriptio Cambriae* he says:

Some, indeed, object to this my undertaking, and, apparently from motives of affection, compare me to a painter, who, rich in colours, and like another Zeuxis⁶⁴, eminent in his art, is endeavouring with all his skill and industry to give celebrity to a cottage, or to some other contemptible object, whilst the world is anxiously expecting from his hand a temple or a palace. Thus they wonder that I, amidst the many great and striking subjects which the world

⁶¹ Internet reference: Medieval Source Book, Gerald of Wales, Opera (Rolls Series), iv. 139, ed. Joseph Jacobs, *The Jews of Angevin England: Documents and Records* (London, 1893), pp. 283-85), ref. 5/11/06

⁶² Itinerary Through Wales, Project Gutenberg etext. David Price 1997 from J. M. Dent ed. 1912, chapter 1.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Internet reference: ArtCult.com -- <http://www.artcult.com/zeuxis.html> ref. November 10, 2006 Zeuxis was born in Héraclee around 464 B.-C and was presumably the pupil of Appolodore. As a painter he specialised in the representation of female figures bringing much feeling in his works. Asked once to paint Helen, the wife of Ulysses, he chose five beautiful women as models and reunited the best of her features and shapes to produce his work. Admiring this painting, the painter Nicomachus said he felt he was seeing a goddess. Zeuxis also painted a family of Centaurs which was considered as one of his masterpieces. He had also to compete with Parrhasius when both were asked to produce a painting that would determine who was the best Greek painter. Zeuxis painted a still-life of grapes which was so perfect that birds tried to pick up while Parrhasius showed him a painting covered by a veil which he tried to raise but it occurred that the veil was in fact a painting itself. Zeuxis then had to admit his defeat. He was known to have painted an assembly of gods, Hercules strangling snakes in his cot, Eros crowned with roses, Alcmène, Menelas, an athlete, Pan, Marsyas chained and an old woman. Most of his works were taken to Rome and to Byzance but disappeared during the time of Pausanias.

presents, should choose to describe and to adorn, with all the graces of composition, such remote corners of the earth as Ireland and Wales.⁶⁵

If taken with a modicum of salt however, even this vainglorious attitude seems forgivable. With the prevailing piousness of the time, his arrogance is almost like a breath of fresh air. On the positive side he was a committed Welsh patriot, although it is sometimes difficult to see it in his derogatory comments about his fellow Welshmen, who waged a lifelong battle for the independence of the see of St. David's of Canterbury. Gwenwynwyn, the Prince of Powys paid tribute to Gerald's tenacity:

Many and great wars have we Welshmen waged with England, but none so great and fierce as his who fought the king and the archbishop, and withstood the might of the whole clergy and people of England, for the honour of Wales.⁶⁶

Above all Gerald believed with all his being that the Welsh church be answerable only to Rome and not to Canterbury and England, the oppressors and occupiers of their land:

What can be more unjust than that this people of ancient faith, because they answer force by force in defence of their lives, their lands, and their liberties, should be forthwith separated from the body corporate of Christendom, and delivered over to Satan?⁶⁷

Llywelyn ap Iorwerth praised Gerald's efforts, "So long as Wales shall stand by the writings of the chroniclers and by the songs of the bards shall his noble deed be praised throughout all time." The dichotomy between the two sides of Gerald is particularly well illustrated in his lifelong battle for an independent Welsh see. That he could be so disparaging of the Welsh yet believe so passionately in their throwing off the yoke of their subjugation shows is perhaps the clearest indicator of his hybrid background and his confused sense of identity.

⁶⁵ Descriptio Cambriae, Project Gutenberg etext. David Price 1997 from J. M. Dent ed. 1912, first preface.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

⁶⁷ *ibid.*

CHAPTER TWO

THE NATURAL VS THE SUPERNATURAL

MEDIEVAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF THE NATURAL & SUPERNATURAL WORLDS

In the twenty-first century what we consider to be natural versus what is considered un- or ‘super’-natural seems very clear cut and unambiguous, although the latter continues to fascinate and enthrall. However in the medieval world of Gerald the boundaries between the two were less defined and blurred into one another. Things which we consider to be strange and “supernatural” were accepted without question and deemed to be entirely normal. Nothing was seen as random, all was God’s creation, whether it seemed inexplicable or not. Ghosts, magic, strange beings were all part of the scheme of things and were crucial to maintaining a theological balance; the wonders and miracles of God required a dark counterpart. The supernatural served as analogy for what the church deemed to be negative forces inherent in society and it was thought better to recognize them rather than to repress them entirely and allow them to fester at its fringes.⁶⁸

The concept of what is ‘natural’ has formed the core of Western philosophy since ancient times⁶⁹ and, as all things require an oppositional action, naturally leads to a debate of what is therefore defined *against* it.⁷⁰ The delimitation of nature’s boundaries was not just of concern to theologians and philosophers but also to historians and travel writers, to all in fact who sought to describe it and its antithesis in words.⁷¹ As Derrida points out, “language constructs meaning solely through difference” and thus the ‘normal’ must be balanced by the ‘abnormal’: “The category of ‘normal’ is thus always already unthinkable without the idea of “abnormal”.⁷² Hence the natural is also unthinkable without the unnatural or supernatural. The actual word *supernaturalis* first appeared in the Middle Ages, yet the *idea* of the supernatural is far older and can be traced back to Plato’s distinction between the material, visible world and the realm of the Ideas:

This two-story structure became the standard frame of reference, but also the bone of contention, in the perennial controversy between Platonism and Anti-Platonism. As a matter of fact, the idea of hierarchical super- and subordination recurs even within the realm of the Ideas themselves up to the peak, the Idea of the Good, in its solitary

⁶⁸ Richard Kieckhefer, ‘The Specific Rationality of Medieval Magic’, *The American historical Review*, Vol. 99, No. 3 (Jun., 1994), pp. 813 – 836, p. 813

⁶⁹ Robert Bartlett, *The Natural and the Supernatural in the Middle Ages: The Wiles Lectures given at the Queen’s University of Belfast, 2006*. Cambridge University Press (Cambridge, 2008), p. 1

⁷⁰ Bartlett (2008), p. 3

⁷¹ Bartlett (2008), p. 17

⁷² Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, John Hopkins University Press (Baltimore, 1976); Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, ‘Monster Culture (Seven theses)’, in Cohen (ed), *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, University of Minnesota Press (Minneapolis, 1999), pp. 3 – 25, p. 7; in Bettina Bildhauer & Robert Mills (eds.), *The Monstrous Middle Ages*, University of Toronto Press (Toronto/Buffalo, 2003), p. 13

splendor “above and beyond even the idea of Being.” (Republic, 509 B) However, the conception of Divinity as the Supernatural Being par excellence beyond all rational comprehension is still missing. Plato’s demiurge is rather a mediator between the real below and the ideal above. Only in Plotinus, who adds the superrational story of his divine One at the top of Plotinic structure, does the conception of a supernatural Divinity enter. Yet it enters with a vengeance. It was this Plotinian idea of the supernatural which, through the avenue of Dionysius and Eriugena, became the most influential factor in shaping Christian theological supernaturalism.⁷³

The Catholic theologian Henri de Lubac traced the evolution of the word *supernaturalis* in his 1946 work *Surnaturel: études historiques* (Paris, 1946) and found that before the twelfth century it was extremely rare;⁷⁴ the exception being the scholar John the Scot who seems to have used the term as an equivalent for the Greek ὑπερφυσικός of the Pseudo-Dionysius, which he then used extensively in his *Periphyseon*.⁷⁵ However, Denys l’Aréopagite in *La Hiérarchie céleste*⁷⁶ argues that “merveilleux” is a better translation than “surnaturel”.⁷⁷ What is interesting is that the idea could easily be expressed by the phrase *supra naturam* – above nature – and its value is less about the idea which it conveys and more about the intellectual climate of the time.⁷⁸ After the use of the term by Thomas Aquinas, as de Lubac says, “the distinction natural/supernatural tends to replace many analogous distinctions.”⁷⁹ The Index Thomisticus (which admittedly does not just contain works by Aquinas) contains no less than 370 instances of the word.⁸⁰ One of the earliest uses was by Bonaventure in his Life of St Francis in the early 1260s,⁸¹ appearing in vernacular languages at the end of the Middle Ages.⁸² It appeared in French for the first time in 1375, in Raoul (erroneously listed as Robert in *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française*⁸³) de Presles’s translation of Augustine’s *City of God*. The first occurrence in the *Oxford English Dictionary* was in the mid fifteenth century translation of Thomas á Kempis’ *Imitation of Christ* where the Latin phrase *naturaliter vel supernaturaliter* is rendered as “naturally or supernaturally”.⁸⁴

According to Jacques Le Goff, the supernatural could be divided into three categories in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries; *mirabilis*, *magicus*, and *miraculosus*.⁸⁵ The first of these, *mirabilis*, corresponds to pre-Christian concepts of the marvelous. *Magicus* originally encompassed both black and white magic, although only the latter was deemed legitimate; but it

⁷³ Herbert Spiegelberg, ‘Supernaturalism or Naturalism: A Study in Meaning and Verifiability’, *Philosophy of Science*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (Oct., 1951), pp. 339 – 368, p. 341

⁷⁴ Bartlett (2008), p. 12

⁷⁵ Edouard Jeaneau (ed.), 5 vols., *Corpus Christianorum, continuation medievalis* 161 – 5, 1996 – 2003

⁷⁶ Günter Heil and Maurice de Gandillac (ed. & trans.), (Sources chrétiennes 58, 1958)

⁷⁷ Bartlett (2008), fn. 24, pp. 13 - 14

⁷⁸ Bartlett (2008), p. 13

⁷⁹ de Lubac (1946), pp. 398 – 9; in Bartlett (2008), p. 13

⁸⁰ Bartlett (2008), p. 13

⁸¹ Bartlett (2008), p. 15

⁸² Bartlett (2008), p. 16

⁸³ Alain Rey (ed.), 2 vols., (Paris, 1992)

⁸⁴ *The Earliest English Translation of the First Three Books of the De imitation Christi*, John K Ingram (ed.), (Early English Text Society, extra series 63, 1893), p. 94; in Bartlett (2008), p. 16 and fn. 28, p. 16

⁸⁵ Jacques Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*. University of Chicago Press (London/Chicago, 1988), p. 30; also Bartlett (2008), fn. 29, p. 17

quickly came to refer to the former only. The last category, *miraculosus*, was specifically Christian, a sort of Christianized marvelous.⁸⁶

One characteristic of the marvelous is of course that of being produced by supernatural forces or beings (note the plural), and one finds something of the sort in the plural *mirabilia* of the Middle Ages. The marvelous embraces a world of diverse objects and actions behind which lies a multiplicity of forces. Now, in Christian marvels and miracles there is an author...but that author is God, in the singular. In other words, the status of the marvelous is problematic in any religion, but particularly in a monotheistic religion. As rules develop to define what may legitimately be considered miraculous, the marvel is “rationalized” and stripped of its essential unpredictability.⁸⁷

The word *marvel* has its etymological roots in the Latin verb *mirare* – to look at – and suggests a visual apparition. The miracle depends only upon the will of God, and is distinguished from natural events (also the will of God) by the regularity built into creation by God himself.⁸⁸ Gervase of Tilbury introduces his collection of amazing tales by making an important distinction. After discussing the general concept of *inaudita* – things which are unheard of, things which are outside the ordinary course of nature, he divides this category still further:⁸⁹

From these arise two things, miracles and wonders (*miracula et mirabilia*), although the end result of both is amazement. Now we commonly call things miracles that are beyond nature and that we ascribe to the divine power...However, we call things marvels that are beyond our understanding, even when they are natural.⁹⁰

So therefore, miracles are caused directly by god and are beyond nature whereas marvels are merely natural, albeit unusual and inexplicable.⁹¹ The concept of wonder was paradoxical, a “coincidence of opposites”. Again and again in the texts one finds *mira* (wondrous) alongside *mixta* (mixed or composite things), a word that evokes ideas of monsters and the weird hybrid creatures found in the literature of entertainment.⁹²

These distinctions maintained important conceptual boundaries. Thomas Aquinas, talking of monsters says: “Monsters occur in nature...they occur beyond the intention of active nature but they are not termed miracles.”⁹³ The phases “in nature” and “beyond the intention of active nature” allotted a special place for the monstrous in the natural world while preserving the category of ‘miracle’ intact.⁹⁴ According to Augustine, a miracle was “something difficult which

⁸⁶ Le Goff (1988), p. 30

⁸⁷ Le Goff (1988), pp. 30 - 31

⁸⁸ Le Goff (1988), p. 31

⁸⁹ Bartlett (1988), p. 18

⁹⁰ Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia* 3. Pref., ed. S E Banks and J W Binns (Oxford, 2002), p. 558; in Bartlett (2008), p. 18

⁹¹ Bartlett (2008), p. 19

⁹² Caroline Bynum Walker, ‘Wonder’, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 102, No. 1 (Feb., 1997), pp. 1 – 26, p. 7

⁹³ *Super Sententiis*, lib. 2 d. 18 q. 1. A 3 arg. 6, *Opera omnia*, ed. Roberto Busa (7 vols., Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, 1980), 1, p 176; in Bartlett (2008), p. 19

⁹⁴ Bartlett (2008), p. 19

seldom occurs, exceeding the faculty of nature and so far surpassing our hopes as to compel our astonishment.”⁹⁵

The marvelous existed in a theoretical space between the miraculous and the magical. Because it is neither good nor evil it can be tolerated by Christianity, but the roots are the marvelous lie firmly in a pre-Christian folkloric tradition.⁹⁶ The magical and the demonic, which occupied basically the same space yet differed in a few key aspects, were also believed to lie within the realm of the natural, and were to have a long future in the thinking which formed the basis of the witch-hunts.⁹⁷ The magical was further complicated by alternative approaches, which were natural yet not demonic. William of Auvergne, bishop of Paris and teacher of theology at that university, regarded *magica naturalis* as innocent:

Those things worked by natural magic are not an offence against the Creator or a wrong, unless someone employs that art either too curiously or for evil.⁹⁸

Properly directed natural magic was simply a branch of natural science, one which was concerned with the wonderful works of nature, such as plagues of frogs and lice. Practitioners applied their skills to sharpen the processes while still glorifying their creator and understanding that nature worked through God’s omnipotent will.⁹⁹

The marvelous fulfilled several important functions in medieval society. It was a means of escapism from the banality of the everyday; an inverted mirror image of society which turned time around and harkened back to the origins of man as a utopian existence. It also provided a means of resistance to official Christian ideology. In Muslim tales of the marvelous there is almost always reference to man; yet in the medieval West there existed a largely dehumanized world of flora, fauna and minerals. It served as a cultural resistance to and a rejection of humanism and an anthropomorphic image of God.¹⁰⁰

European intellectual history was radically transformed after 1100 when the works of Greek authors were translated in greater numbers. Aristotle’s uncontroversial works on logic had long been available but the ecclesiastical authorities viewed his works on natural philosophy with suspicion. These works offered a rational and systematic analysis of the world from a non-Christian viewpoint, yet by the mid-thirteenth century they formed a foundation of university

⁹⁵ Augustine, *De utilitate credenda*, c. 16, in *Augustini opera omnia*, in *Patrologiae cursus completus: series Latina*, J-P Migne (ed.), 221 vols. (Paris, 1841 – 64), 42: col. 90; in Bynum (1997), p. 8

⁹⁶ Le Goff (1988), p. 36

⁹⁷ Bartlett 92008), p. 20

⁹⁸ *Opera omnia* (2 vols., Orleans, 1674, reprint Frankfurt, 1963) 1, pp. 593 – 1074; some parts translated: *The Universe of Creatures*, tr. Roland J Teske (Milwaukee, 1998); in Bartlett (2008), p. 21

⁹⁹ Ibid. 24, p. 70; in Bartlett (2008), p. 22

¹⁰⁰ Le Goff (1988), p. 32

study.¹⁰¹ Aquinas placed miracles within an Aristotelian framework which was more orderly than that of Augustine's.¹⁰² The opening of *Metaphysics* says:

...all men begin...by wondering that things are as they are...as in the case of marionettes or of the solstices or of the incommensurability of the diagonal of a square with respect to its side...But we must end with the contrary...for nothing would make a geometrician wonder so much as this, namely, if a diagonal were to be commensurable with the side of a square.¹⁰³

It was the canonization process of around 1200¹⁰⁴ which helped particularly focus upon the distinctions between the natural or magical from miracles; it was not an easy task. For example, how did one distinguish between legitimate invocation and prohibited incantation? One of the great canon lawyers of the thirteenth century, Hostiensis, insisted that a true miracle was *not* the result solely from the power of words.¹⁰⁵ Albertus Magnus, the teacher of Aquinas, found himself getting entangled in the semantics of the arguments. When asked if the conjurations of the Pharaoh's magicians were miracles, he at first affirms that they did change the staffs into serpents, but then argues that they were not strictly miracles because wood naturally turns into serpents (an axiom that the rotting wood of trees generated serpents). The Pharaoh's magicians were merely speeding up the process with the assistance of demons, "through the subtlety and agility of their nature." However, if this is then compared to Christ's turning water into wine then one could argue that water naturally turns into wine through absorption by the vines. Albertus covers his tracks by stating that Christ made wine by the command of his will.¹⁰⁶ Anyway, he argues it is not the instantaneous action that defines a miracle, but the raising of the event above the order of nature; accordingly, the Pharaoh's magicians performed were "wonders" not "miracles".¹⁰⁷

What is particularly striking is the lack of constant systematic thinking of medieval theologians on the subject. The concept of nature and its opposites, and what is construed as miracle, marvel or magic, was not the stuff of easy definition, that is true but developing a framework in which they could be explored proved to be difficult to achieve. The language of the natural and the supernatural developed under the pressure of dogmatic constraints. God could not be defined as "unnatural" and it was hard to classify anything God did as "contrary to nature"; God was

¹⁰¹ Bartlett (2008), pp. 30 - 31

¹⁰² Lorraine Daston, 'Marvelous Facts and Miraculous Evidence in Early Modern Europe', *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (Autumn, 1991), pp. 93 - 124

¹⁰³ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Hippocrates G Apostle trans. (Bloomington, Ind., 1966), book A 983 a 11. 13 - 21, p. 16; in Bynum (1997), p. 7

¹⁰⁴ Bartlett (2008), p. 10

¹⁰⁵ Hostiensis (Henry de Segusio), *Summa aurea* (Lyons, 1548), III, sub rubric "De reliquiis et veneratione sanctorum", fol. 188v; in Bartlett (2008), p. 23

¹⁰⁶ Albertus Magnus, *Summa Theologica* 2. 8. 30. 1. 1, ed. A Borgnet, *Opera omnia* 32 (Paris, 1895), p. 323; in Bartlett (2008), p. 25

¹⁰⁷ Bartlett (2008), pp. 25 - 26

identified as *prima natura* and hence his deeds were “natural”.¹⁰⁸ Ergo, if to God all things were of nature, then there could be no miracles.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Alexander of Hales, *Summa theologica* 2. 2. 3. 2. q .3, tit. 3, 1, “de miraculis” (4 vols. In 5, plus index vol., Quarracchi, 1924 – 79) 2, p. 286; in Bartlett (2008), p. 27

¹⁰⁹ Bartlett (2008), p. 27

CHAPTER THREE
ANGELS AND DEMONS
MAGICAL AND SUPERNATURAL BEINGS

Gerald shared a literary interest in strange phenomena such as poltergeists, vampires, incubi, and evil spirits with his contemporaries, especially writers such as Walter Map and William of Newburgh.¹¹⁰ Like Map's *De Nugis Curialium*, the *Itinerarium Kambriae* contains tales of demons, fairies, and restless ghosts, while the *Topographia* has tales of islands inhabited by good and evil spirits and magical fires that never go out. Both include vignettes of individuals endowed with the gift of prophesy and the truth of their words. The proliferation of tales of this type – werewolves, fairies, and vampires – showed the enthusiasm in the Middle Ages for “alterity and escapism” and also the mingled sense of fascination and horror that people felt at “the possibility that persons might, actually or symbolically, become beasts or angels, suddenly possessed by demons or inspired to prophecy.”¹¹¹ All these entities stemmed from the prevailing belief in miracles and wonder and how man's contact with the supernatural was divided into “positive” and “negative”, which provided a disjunction between the “savage” and the “civilized.”¹¹² The Devil filled an important role in medieval theology, by creating an orderly purpose and testing the faithful within carefully set parameters. Demons were not so easily explained; indeed Gerald himself was at a loss to explain the spirits that inhabited the homes of Stephen Wiriet and William Not in Pembrokeshire.¹¹³ As he goes on to explain:

If you ask me the cause and explanation of an event of this sort, I do not know what to answer, except that it has often been the presage, as they call it, of a sudden change from poverty to wealth, or more often still from wealth to poverty and utter desolation, as, indeed, it was in both of these cases. It seems most remarkable to me that places cannot be cleansed of visitations of this sort by the sprinkling of holy water, which is in general use and could be applied liberally, or by the performing of some other religious ceremony. On the contrary, when the priests go in, however devoutly and protected by the crucifix and holy water, they are among the first to suffer the ignominy of having filth thrown over them. From this it appears that the sacraments and things pertaining to them protect us from actual harm but not from trifling insults, from attack but not from our own imaginings.¹¹⁴

There is however a strong note of skepticism here, as if Gerald considers that many of these manifestations are the products of the imagination. While I believe that Gerald's interest followed the usual medieval fascination with the subject, I also see a deeper, more personal, purpose in his forays into the supernatural. One can read in his musings on strange phenomena,

¹¹⁰ Lewis Thorpe, ‘Walter Map and Gerald of Wales’, *Medium aevum*, 47 (1978), pp. 6 – 21, p. 10

¹¹¹ Bynum (2005), pp. 25 - 26

¹¹² R J Z Werblowsky, ‘Commerce with the Supernaturals,’ *Numne*, Vol. 31, Fasc. 1 (July 1984), pp. 129 – 135, p. 129

¹¹³ Jeremy Harte, ‘Hell on Earth: Encountering ‘Devils in the Medieval Landscape’; in Bildhauer/Mills (eds.) (2003), pp. 177 – 195, p. 185; *Itinerarium*, Book I, ch. 12, p. 151

¹¹⁴ *Itinerarium*, Book I, ch. 12, pp. 151 - 152

peoples and creatures (the latter discussed in detail in chapter four) a discursive on the transformation from paganism to Christianity within the Celtic parts of the British Isles, and on Gerald's own cultural conflict.

Fairies were diminutive beings frequently depicted in Celtic myths and legends.¹¹⁵ They are not just creatures of the distant past, as belief in them still strongly persists in Celtic regions.¹¹⁶ In the *Itinerarium* Gerald describes the experiences in fairy land of a priest named Elidyr by which he entered through a hollow in a river bank at the invitation of two of the inhabitants of that realm. Unlike others who had contact with these Otherworld beings, Elidyr did not find a fairy bride, but like many Welsh fairy legends there *is* an association with lakes or water. These associations most likely derived from the possibility that fairies were the original lake dwelling inhabitants of the area.¹¹⁷ The origins of the stories seem to be extremely ancient, maybe even from as far back as prehistoric times. Often there was an element of intermarriage which intimates that these early inhabitants became amalgamated with their conquerors.¹¹⁸ Here is Gerald's tale of the adventures of Elidyr which paves the way for subsequent Welsh fairy tales:¹¹⁹

Somewhat before our own time an odd thing happened in these parts [the Gower peninsula]. The priest Elidyr always maintained that it was he who was the person concerned. When he was a young innocent only twelve years old and busy learning to read, he ran away one day and hid under the hollow bank of some river or other, for he has had more than enough of the harsh discipline and frequent blows meted out by his teacher. As Solomon says: 'Learning's root is bitter, but the fruit it bears is sweet.' Two days passed and there he still lay hidden, with nothing at all to eat. Then two tiny men appeared, no bigger than pigmies. 'If you will come away with us,' they said, 'we will take you to a land where all is playtime and pleasure.' The boy agreed to go. He rose to his feet and followed them. They led him first through a dark underground tunnel and then into a most attractive country, where there were lovely rivers and meadows, and delightful woodlands and plains. It was rather dark, because the sun did not shine there. The days were all overcast, as if by clouds, and the nights were pitch-black, for there was no moon nor stars. The boy was taken to see their king and presented to him, with all his court standing around. They were amazed to see him, and the king stared at him for a long time. Then he handed him over to his own son, who was still a child. All these men were very tiny, but beautifully made and well-proportioned. In complexion they were fair, and they wore their hair long and flowing down over their shoulders like women. They had horses of a size which suited them, about as big as greyhounds. They never ate meat or fish. They lived on various milk dishes, made up into junkets flavoured with saffron. They never gave their word, for they hated lies more than anything they could think of. Whenever they came back from the upper world, they would speak contemptuously of our own ambitions, infidelities and inconstancies. They had no wish for public worship, and what they revered and admired, or so it seemed, was the plain unvarnished truth. The boy used frequently to return to our upper world. Sometimes he came by the tunnel through which he had gone down, sometimes by another route. At first he was accompanied, but later on he came by himself. He made himself known only to his mother. He told her all about the country, the sort of people who lived there and his own relationship with them. His mother asked him to bring her back a present of gold, a substance which was extremely common in that country. He stole a golden ball, which he used when he was playing with the king's son. He hurried away from the game and carried the ball as fast as he could to his mother,

¹¹⁵ James MacKillop, *Dictionary of Celtic Mythology*. Oxford University Press (Oxford, 1998), p. 200

¹¹⁶ Wirt Sikes, *British Goblins: Welsh Folklore, Fairy Mythology, Legends and Traditions*. Wildside Press (Doylestown, PA), p. 8

¹¹⁷ Elias Owen, *Welsh Folk-Lore*. Dodo Press (www.dodopress.co.uk, 1887, undated), pp. 21 - 22

¹¹⁸ Elias Owen, *Welsh Folk-Lore*. Dodo Press (www.dodopress.co.uk, 1887, undated), pp. 21 - 22

¹¹⁹ Owen (1887), p. 27

using the customary route. He reached the door of his father's house, rushed in and tripped over the threshold. The little folk were in hot pursuit. As he fell over in the very room where his mother was sitting, the ball slipped from his hand. Two little men who were at his heels snatched the ball and ran off with it, showing him every mark of scorn, contempt and derision. The boy got to his feet, very red in the face at shame at what he had done. As he recovered his wits he realized that what his mother had asked him to do was very foolish. He set back out along the road which he usually followed, down the path to the river, but when he came to where the underground passage had been there was no entry to be found. For nearly a year he searched the overhanging banks of the river, but he could never find the tunnel again.

The passing of time helps us to forget our problems more surely than arguing rationally about them can ever hope to do, and our day-to-day preoccupations blunt the edge of our worries. As the months pass by we think less and less of our troubles. Once the boy had settled down among his friends and learned to find solace in his mother's company, he became himself once more and took up his studies again. In the process of time he became a priest. The years passed and he became an old man; but whenever David II, Bishop of St David's [Gerald's uncle, David FitzGerald], questioned him about what had happened, he would burst into tears as he told the story. He still remembered the language of the little folk and he could repeat quite a number of words which, as young people do, he had learnt very quickly.¹²⁰

Gerald depicts fairies in fairly neutral terms, as neither good nor bad. It is probable that he sees them as the remnants of a forgotten past and therefore as a kind of 'Other'. Gerald's hypothesis is that the fairy folk are a link to the earliest Trojan invaders of Wales, probably the same invaders that he details in the *Topographia* as colonists of Ireland¹²¹, information that he gleaned from earlier texts on Irish history and mythology, and he uses as linguistics as evidence. The fairies' word for water was 'ydor', which was akin to the Greek 'ὕδωρ'. The corresponding medieval Welsh word is 'dwfr'. Their word for salt was 'halgein', corresponding to the Greek 'αλς' and the Welsh 'halen'.¹²² The language of the fairies was then (according to Gerald) cognate with Greek and Welsh, both Indo-European languages, which does support a hypothesis that they were early settlers. There is a tone of respect for the fairies value system here, which Gerald obviously admires and respects, and he praises their abhorrence of theft, ambition and inconstancies.¹²³ This is rather unusual for medieval authors who generally depicted fairies and elves as demons; "emanations of evil...but not very menacing ones".¹²⁴ Despite their usual lack of menace they were seen as extensions of Satan himself and the magical principles which he represented.¹²⁵ Before the thirteenth century there were theologians who denied or modified the belief in demons, but from the thirteenth century on, to deny their existence and power was to invite an accusation of heresy.¹²⁶ Fairies were merely co-opted into the current theological thought system.

¹²⁰ *Itinerarium Cambriae*, Book I, Ch. 8, pp. 133 - 135

¹²¹ *Topographia*, Part 3, chps. 87, 88

¹²² *Itinerarium Cambriae*, Book I, Chp. 8, p. 135

¹²³ Owen (1887), p. 27

¹²⁴ Reginald of Durham, *Libellus de Vita et Miraculis Sancti Godrici, Heremita de Finchale*, Joseph Stevenson (ed.), Surtees Society, 20. Nichols (London, 1847), pp. 196, 275; in Harte (203), p. 193

¹²⁵ Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages*. Cornell University Press (Ithaca/ London), 1972, p. 101

¹²⁶ Russell (1972), p. 18

Another theory regards fairies and “little people” as not literal remnants from earlier inhabitants but as ancestors and thus part of a system of ancestor worship. It is still commonly believed by some cultures that when the soul is separated from the body it resembles a tiny person, identical to the person in life. The dead then, in the form of these tiny beings, live as they did in life, separated from the human world by some physical obstacle.¹²⁷ Fairy legends, so common in many cultures, could very easily originate in this belief.

As demons go however, fairies were considered only very minor ones. It was the major pagan deities that were classified as major demons¹²⁸ and fairies were clearly not in their league. Gerald borrows from Augustine in asserting that demons can do things – permitted by God – which deceive our senses,¹²⁹ which may explain some of the occurrences he chronicles, such as those in Pembrokeshire. A common and far less ambiguous medieval personification of demons was as incubi and succubae, which were originally derived from the idea of fallen angels who lusted after the daughters of men,¹³⁰ “airy spirits who appear on earth to rape and impregnate women.”¹³¹ We tend to think of them as akin to the modern vampire, but they were not undead and bore very little resemblance to the archetype of the vampire that we know today. They were however very much a part of the medieval discourse on the body,¹³² and also became a crucial aspect of the later witch-hunting mania which swept Europe. At any rate apparently the early medieval world was infested by them; indeed, one of Wales’ most famous sons – Merlin himself – was the product of the union between a human and an incubus. Gerald’s sources are exposed clearly here. Like many others, such as Gervase of Tilbury, he is merely parroting one of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s most famous fictions.¹³³ Gerald believed that there were, in fact, two Merlins (as did many): both were imbued with the gift of prophesy, but one was Welsh (the prodigy of an incubus) who appeared in the tale of Vortigern¹³⁴, and the other Scots or northern British who corresponds to the medieval archetype of a wild man, who Gerald also mentions in the *Expugnatio*.¹³⁵ Interestingly, both also embodied two separate medieval constructions of outsiders. It is the latter that Gerald said was Arthur’s contemporary, an untamed counterbalance to the civilized, kingly Arthur. The wild man was a representation of a ‘negative ideal’, a

¹²⁷ William Howells, *The Heathens: Primitive Man and His Religions*. (Garden City, NJ, 1962), pp. 166, 170; Wilhelm Wundt, *Elements of Folk Psychology*. (London, 1916), p. 396; in John J Winberry, ‘The Elusive Elf: Some Thoughts on the Nature and Origin of the Irish Leprechaun,’ *Folklore*, Vol. 87, No. 1 (1976), pp. 63 – 75, p. 69

¹²⁸ Russell (1972), p. 13

¹²⁹ Bynum (2005), p. 17

¹³⁰ Russell (1972), p. 115

¹³¹ Cohen (1999), p. 53

¹³² Cohen (1999), p. 140

¹³³ C C Oman, ‘The English Folklore of Gervase of Tilbury,’ *Folklore*, Vol. 55, No. 1 (Mar., 1944), pp. 2 - 15

¹³⁴ Here Geoffrey was borrowing from the *Historia Brittonum*, ‘The Tale of Emrys’; Frank D Reno, *Historic Figures of the Arthurian Era*. McFarland & Co. Inc. Publishers (Jefferson, NC, 1937, 2000), p. 135

¹³⁵ Giraldus Cambrensis, *The Conquest of Ireland*. Translated by Thomas Forester, revised and edited by Thomas Wright. In parentheses Publications (Cambridge, Ont. 2001), Book I, chp. III, p. 14

reaction to “the severity and regulatory extremes of medieval civilization.”¹³⁶ The anthropologist Mary Douglas articulated it thus:

In each constructed world of nature, the contrast between man and not-man provides an analogy for the contrast between the *member* of the human *society* and the *outsider*.¹³⁷

The wild man was erotic and brutal and formed a prominent figure in legends and stories.¹³⁸ They represented the outsider, the opposite of courtly civility.¹³⁹ The Wild Man was also linked with the gift of prophesy, and we find him in some form in all cultures. Pre-Islamic Arabia, for instance, had a large number of poets who were deemed to be possessed by spirits which allowed them to foresee the future.¹⁴⁰ Indeed, ‘poet’ is often attached to many Celtic ‘wild men’, as is the idea of possession.¹⁴¹ The archetype correlates with incubi in so much as they both represent oppositional forces to the concept of ‘good’ and ‘Godly’. In the Middle Ages such opposing forces were vital; the most important being up/down and inside/outside.¹⁴² Incubi represented the former, as demons/fallen angels and the concept of falling from grace, whereas the Wild Man represented the latter as a creature which existed beyond the boundaries of civilization and existed as an outsider.

One of the incubi Gerald mentions frequented Nether Gwent where he was in the habit of nocturnally visiting a young lady, and appears in a long passage concerning the prophecies of Meilyr, “who could explain the occult and foretell the future.”¹⁴³ This particular incubus also seems to serve a more prophetic than malicious role:

About this time an incubus frequented Nether Gwent. There he was in the habit of making love to a certain young woman. He often visited the place where she lived, and in his conversations with the local inhabitants he revealed many secret matters and events which had not yet occurred. Meilyr was questioned about this and he said that he knew the incubus well. He even said what his name was. He maintained that whenever war was imminent, or some great upset in a country, these incubuses were in the habit of visiting human beings. This was soon proved to be true: for shortly afterwards Hywel, the son of Iorwerth of Caerleon, attacked the neighborhood and destroyed the whole area.¹⁴⁴

There does not seem to be anything terribly demonic about this particular incubus (except perhaps his illicit affair with the young lady), nor about another mentioned by Gerald – Simon – although he is described as red-haired which implied a “Venusian or demonical

¹³⁶ Richard Bernheimer, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages: A Study in Art, Sentiment, and Demonology*. Octagon (NY), 1970; in Bildhauer/Mills, ‘Conceptualizing the Monstrous,’ in Bildhauer/Mills (eds.) (2003), pp. 1 – 27, p. 19

¹³⁷ Quoted in Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World. Changing Attitudes in England 1500 – 1800*. (London, 1984), p. 41; in Joep Leerssen, ‘Wildness, Wilderness, and Ireland: Medieval and Early Modern patterns in the Demarcation of Civility,’ *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (Jan., 1995), pp. 25 – 39, p. 25

¹³⁸ Russell (1972), p. 50

¹³⁹ Leerssen (1995), p. 28

¹⁴⁰ Maxime Rodinson, *Mohammed*. Translated by Anne Carter. Vintage Books (NY, 1971, 1974), p. 57

¹⁴¹ See *Descriptio*, Book I, ch. 16 ‘Welsh soothsayers, who behave as if there are possessed.’

¹⁴² Le Goff (1985), p. 91

¹⁴³ *Itinerarium Kambriae*, Book I, Ch. 5, p. 116

¹⁴⁴ *Itinerarium Kambriae*, Book I, Ch. 5, p. 119

characteristic.”¹⁴⁵ Simon himself appears as the epitome of efficiency in managing the household of Elidyr (not the same person as the priest who spent time in fairy-land), and his only crime seems to have been being spotted “conversing with his fellow-demons by the water-mill and the pool” one night.¹⁴⁶ One could even say that Gerald seems rather favourably inclined towards them; certainly he does not paint them as incorrigibly evil as many of his contemporaries do. In the Middle English romance *Sir Gowther* for instance, the incubus is far less benign. The Duchess of Estryke encounters a creature resembling her husband in an orchard:

When he had is wylle all don,

A felturd fende he start up son,

And stole and hur beheld.

He seyde, “Y have geyton a chylde on the

That in is yothe full wylde schall bee.” (70 – 74)¹⁴⁷

Meilyr the prophet himself had a similar type of encounter with what we could guess was a succubus that sent him mad and gave him the ability to see into the future by conversing with unclean spirits:

One evening and, to be precise, it was Palm Sunday, he happened to meet a girl whom he had loved for a long time. She was very beautiful, the spot was an attractive one, and it seemed too good an opportunity to be missed. He was enjoying himself in her arms and tasting her delights, when suddenly, instead of the beautiful girl, he found in his embrace a hairy creature, rough and shaggy, and, indeed, repulsive beyond words. As he stared at the monster his wits deserted him and he became quite mad.¹⁴⁸

We can look at incubi and wild man as exemplars of suppressed sexuality, especially female sexuality, as the above passages illustrate. One could hypothesize that Gerald’s misogyny again comes to the fore here, has the above description of the encounter with a succubus is far less ambivalent than the ones detailing incubi. This theory can be demonstrated in the two prevalent theories on the body in the Middle Ages: according to the Aristotelian model, the woman contributed formless bodily matter (*materia*) to the child whereas the man’s seed (*semen*) which was the structure that organized the inert *materia* into a gendered human being. Galen however asserted that both mother and father contributed seed and therefore also structure to the child.¹⁴⁹ Incubi fit with the Aristotelian model, in that women were passive, whereas the Galenic model has women having more equality, at least in terms of being an equal partner in the production of new life. The offspring of incubi were generally monstrous (and for incubi/succubae we can read

¹⁴⁵ C G Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy* (Collected Works, 12), London, 1953; in Cirlot (1995), p. 135

¹⁴⁶ *Itineararium Kambriae*, book I, Ch. 12, p. 155

¹⁴⁷ When he had worked his will upon her, he leapt up, a hairy fiend, and stood and looked upon her. He said, “I have engendered a child on you who, in his youth, will be very wild. Cohen (1999), p. 122

¹⁴⁸ *Itinerary*, Book I, ch. 5, pp. 116 - 117

¹⁴⁹ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages*. University of Minnesota Press (Minneapolis/London, 1999), p. 54

pagan), and equate to Galen's model of reproduction, yet Gerald does not hint at anything like this in his narrative. We could take this as a sign that Gerald subscribed to that particular way of thinking or, due to his own hybridity, he did not automatically see the offspring of such couplings as monstrous. Merlin is seen as merely prophetic, but one could argue that with his gift, he could be interpreted as monstrous in a way.

Gerald does delve into the realm of what we would consider to be demons in a more classic form; malevolent spirits closely allied with Satan. In the *Topographia* Gerald talks of "an island one part of which is frequented by good and the other by evil spirits."¹⁵⁰ This is an account of St Patrick's Purgatory in Lough Derg, although Gerald does not reference the saint by name in the passage. The island is divided into two; one part visually beautiful while the other "is stony and ugly and is abandoned to the use of evil spirits only." Gerald's symbolism is a little crude but works reasonably well in the context. The island was sacred to both pre-Christian and Christian Celts.¹⁵¹

There is a lake in Ulster which contains an island divided into two parts.

One part contains a very beautiful church with a reputation for holiness, and is well worth seeing. It is distinguished above all other churches by the visitation of angels and the visible and frequent presence of local saints.

But the other part of the island is stony and ugly and is abandoned to the use of evil spirits only. It is nearly always the scene of gatherings and processions of evil spirits, plain to be seen by all. There are nine pits in that part, and if anyone by any chance should venture to spend the night in any one of them – and there is evidence that some rash persons have at times attempted to do so – he is seized immediately by malignant spirits, and is crucified all night by such severe torments, and so continuously afflicted with many unspeakable punishments of fire and water and other things, that, when morning comes, there is found in his poor body scarcely even the smallest trace of life surviving. They say that if a person once undergoes these torments because of a penance imposed on him, he will not have to endure the pains of hell – unless he commit some very serious sin.¹⁵²

The island was a place of pilgrimage from the twelfth century on and where St Patrick had allegedly banished the monster Caoránach, a mother of demons, and where he had descended into Purgatory.¹⁵³ The *Purgatorium Sancti Patricii* was written in the twelfth century by an unknown monk known simply as 'H'. This work dates from around the time that Gerald was writing and it seems unlikely that it would have escaped the notice of someone with Gerald's voracity for books. It is considered to have been an extremely important text in the establishment of the Christian idea of Purgatory.¹⁵⁴ The narrative uses symbolism from pre-Christian times, when the Otherworld was believed to be in the west and situated either on an island, under the

¹⁵⁰ *Topographia*, Part II, chapter 38.

¹⁵¹ Carol G Zaleski, 'St. Patrick's Purgatory: Pilgrimage Motifs in a Medieval Otherworld Vision,' *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 46, No. 4 (Oct. – Dec. 1985), pp. 467 – 485, p. 467

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ MacKillop (1998), p. 303

¹⁵⁴ Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*. (Trans. Arthur Goldhammer), University of Chicago Press (Chicago, 1981), p. 193

sea or in a hollow hill.¹⁵⁵ The dark, that common metaphor for evil, also appears in this passage, and also has relevance to the divisions between pagan and Christian, good and evil. It is hard for us to imagine how much more potent the dark was in the Middle Ages; “the night deprived people of one of their most vital senses.”¹⁵⁶ The night, or more precisely the dark, played a crucial role in Christian theology as a counterpoint to light and thus was symbolic of the eternal fight between good and evil. Like so many other things in the Middle Ages St Patrick’s Purgatory served as a metaphor for the intersection between good and evil, angels and demons, pagan and Christian, and provides as a bridge between the magical entities of the pagan Celts and the saints of the early church. It is here that St Patrick found a tangible way to convert the pagan Irish “through a graphic demonstration of the pains of the damned and the joys of the blessed.”¹⁵⁷

Saints like St. Patrick played a crucial role in the development of the early church and often formed a link of sorts between the pagan past and the Christian present:

...the saints were not merely patterns of moral perfection, whose prayers were invoked by the Church. They were supernatural powers who inhabited their sanctuaries and continued to watch over the welfare of their land and their people.¹⁵⁸

St Patrick himself was the most important of the Irish saints, and the cults of local saints were particularly important to the Church,¹⁵⁹ allowing it to develop “a new Christian mythology – the legends of the saints.”¹⁶⁰ It is interesting however that Gerald dismisses out of hand St Patrick’s most famous legendary achievement, the banishing of snakes from Ireland:

Some indulge in the pleasant conjecture that Saint Patrick and other saints of the island purged the land of all harmful animals. But it is more probable that from the earliest times, and long before the laying of these foundations of the Faith, the island was naturally without these as well as other things.¹⁶¹

O’Meara makes the point that some modern theorists’ think that the legend is in fact of Norse origins and is based upon confusion between the Norse word *Pad-rekr* (toad-expeller) and the Irish form of Patricius (*Padraig*).¹⁶² It is possible that Gerald was aware of this fact, hence his dismissal of it.

From the cult of local saints a vast literature emerged, which can be basically divided into two categories. A “very small section” of contemporary writings, for example the *Passions of*

¹⁵⁵ Zaleski (1985), p. 469

¹⁵⁶ Deborah Youngs and Simon Harris. ‘Demonizing the Night in Medieval Europe: A Temporal Monstrosity?’ in Bildhauer/Mills (eds.) (2003), pp. 134 – 154, p. 135

¹⁵⁷ Zaleski (1985), p. 467

¹⁵⁸ Christopher Dawson, *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*, Image Books, Doubleday (Garden City, NY), 1961, p. 33

¹⁵⁹ Robert Bartlett, ‘Rewriting Saints’ Lives: The Case of Gerald of Wales’, *Sepulchrum*, Vol. 58, No. 3 (Jul. 1983), pp. 598 – 613, p. 598

¹⁶⁰ Dawson (1961), p. 34

¹⁶¹ *Topographia*, Part I, ch. 21, p. 50

¹⁶² J O’Meara (1982), fn. 13, p. 130

Perpetua and Felicitas, can be said to be “absolutely trustworthy”. By far the vast numbers of vitae however, were compiled long after the fact, and rely on a variety of dubious sources.¹⁶³ In short, they were works of fiction rather than records of the saints’ lives. Doble (1943) outlines the basic pattern of the creative process:

The actual facts available, the truth of which is notorious, can be stated in a single sentence. The local gossip may fill up a page or so. To swell his essay the author borrows phrases, and perhaps larger passages, from the Life of St Martin and other books which are in the cathedral library or which he has heard read at matins. He inserts suitable texts from Holy Scripture. He appropriates for his hero stories, which are common property in his time, told of a score of other saints. He introduces into his narrative the patron saints of neighbouring churches and chapels, and makes them companions of the one whose Life he is writing, but always in a subordinate capacity, for of course he has to see that the interests of his own church are duly guarded.¹⁶⁴

The Irish and Welsh saints that Gerald mentions in his texts were mostly real people from the fifth and sixth centuries who were essentially Christianized folk-heroes.¹⁶⁵ The biographical patterning of these saints’ hagiographies “is essentially the same as the basic Indo-European heroic pattern”, though they are differentiated by “the requirements of Celtic culture and the sanctity of the hero.”¹⁶⁶ However, the Irish and Welsh experience of Christianity differed considerably from the Latin and the Anglo-Norman to a large extent, as Celtic Christianity had its centre in monasticism.¹⁶⁷ Gerald had many things to say about his opinions on the Irish and Welsh clergy, and most was not that complimentary, although he did write of the Welsh respect for churches¹⁶⁸ and the “many points praiseworthy” of the Irish clergy.¹⁶⁹

A particularly important saint in medieval Ireland was St Brigid (who, along with Columba and Patrick, are considered to be the three principal native saints of Ireland;¹⁷⁰ they were also said to be contemporaries, as Gerald notes in the *Topographia*¹⁷¹) and Gerald devotes six chapters in the *Topographia* to her and the various miracles that were said to have occurred in Kildare.

In Kildare, in Leinster, which the glorious Brigid has made famous, there are many miracles worthy of being remembered. And the first of them that occurs to one is the fire of Brigid which, they say, is inextinguishable. It is not that it is strictly inextinguishable, but that the nuns and holy women have so carefully and diligently kept and fed it with enough material, that through all the years from the time of the virgin saint until now it has never been

¹⁶³ Doble (1943), pp. 323 - 4

¹⁶⁴ Doble (1943), p. 324

¹⁶⁵ Elissa R Henken, ‘The Saint as Secular Ruler: Aspects of Welsh Hagiography’, *Folklore*, Vol. 98, No. 2 (1987), pp. 226 – 232, p. 226

¹⁶⁶ Elissa R Henken, ‘Folklore of the Welsh Saints’ (MA Thesis, University of Wales, 1982); ‘The Saint as Folk Hero: Biographical Patterning in Welsh Hagiography’, in *Celtic Folklore and Christianity: Studies in Memory of William W Heist*, ed. Patrick K Ford (MacNally and Loftin, Santa Barbara, Ca) 1983, pp. 58 – 74, in Henken (1987), p. 226 v

¹⁶⁷ Christopher Dawson, *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*, Doubleday (Garden City, NY), 1961, p. 50

¹⁶⁸ *Descriptio*, Book I, ch. 18

¹⁶⁹ *Topographia*, Part 3, ch. 104

¹⁷⁰ John T Koch ed. in collaboration with John Carey, *The Celtic heroic Age: Literary Sources for Ancient Celtic Europe and Early Ireland and Wales*. Celtic Studies Publications (Andover, MA & Aberystwyth, 2000), p. 221

¹⁷¹ O’Meara points out that there was over one hundred years between the death of Patrick (493) and Columba (597), *Topographia*, fn. 65, p. 134

extinguished. And although such an amount of wood over such a long time has been burned there, nevertheless the ashes have never increased.¹⁷²

Although in the time of Brigid there were twenty servants of the Lord here, Brigid herself being the twentieth, only nineteen have ever been here after her death until now, and the number has never increased. They all, however, take their turns, one each night, in guarding the fire. When the twentieth night comes, the nineteenth nun puts the logs beside the fire and says:

‘Brigid, guard your fire. This is your night.’

And in this way the fire is left there, and in the morning the wood, as usual, has been burnt and the fire is still alight.¹⁷³

Brigid probably best epitomizes the transition from pagan goddess to Christian saint, an appropriation from pre-Christian times; many Celtic saints had precedents in earlier, pagan times, and also the transition of Ireland itself from pagan to Christian. In pre-Christian Ireland Brigid was the goddess Brigit, who was associated fire, smithing, cattle, crops, fertility, and poetry.¹⁷⁴ The name is cognate with the Roman—British goddess Brigantia, from whom the Brigantes tribe took their name, and also with the key Celtic legal concept of *bryein*, ‘exalted privilege’ which formed a crucial aspect of early Celtic hierarchical ideology and was adapted by the early church to their advantage.¹⁷⁵ Brigit’s importance her native Ireland ensured her appropriation by the Celtic church. In pagan societies, fire was considered to be an earthly counterpart to the sun, a thing that could purify, cleanse, warm, or destroy.¹⁷⁶ It held enormous importance to them as a crucial element in survival and numerous pagan deities in every known culture were associated with it. The Christianized Brigid kept her associations with fire, and the fire which Gerald mentions was most probably situated on a pagan sacred site which had been appropriated by the Church. This appropriation was also shown in the sites of sacred wells (although churches were normally built upon pre-Christian sites as well), an area that Gerald does not miss. In ‘The Wonderful Nature of Wells’ in the *Topographia*¹⁷⁷ Gerald talks of wells all over Europe which have magical properties. These wells were a tangible link between past folk beliefs and Christianity and there is considerable ethnographic evidence of the “dual systems of belief persisting following ‘conversion’ to Christianity”¹⁷⁸ in many cultures.

Gerald also mentions a book of the concordance of the four gospels according to St Jerome which was allegedly created by angels which existed in Kildare. He says of the illustrations in them:

¹⁷² *Topographia*, II, 67, pp. 81 - 2

¹⁷³ *Topographia*, II, 68, p. 82

¹⁷⁴ McKillop (1998), p. 58

¹⁷⁵ Koch (2000), p. 370

¹⁷⁶ McKillop (1998), p. 235

¹⁷⁷ *Topographia*, Part 2, ch. 40

¹⁷⁸ Paul Davies & John G Robb, ‘The Appropriation of the Material of Places in the Landscape: the case of tufa and springs,’ *Landscape Research*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (2002), pp. 181 – 185, p. 182

If you look at them carelessly and casually and not too closely, you may judge them to be mere daubs rather than careful compositions. You will see nothing subtle where everything is subtle. But if you take the trouble to look very closely, and penetrate with your eyes to the secrets of artistry, you will notice such intricacies, so delicate and subtle, so close together and well-knitted, so involved and bound together, and so fresh still in their colourings that you will not hesitate to declare that all these things must have been the result of the work, not of men, but of angels.¹⁷⁹

This was a fairly typical medieval response to something wonderful; that it must be the product of the special workings of God rather than man. Bacon, the man seen by many as the “precursor of modern science”¹⁸⁰ saw it rather differently, that these things were in fact the product of *rationes naturals*.¹⁸¹ Gerald however saw anything wonderful as being beyond man, especially the Irish clergy, of whom Gerald does not think very highly and probably deemed incapable of artistic accomplishments such as the book in question.

Gerald did not always delineate between magic and the miraculous quite as his contemporaries did and I think this stems from his own dualist nature. His depictions of incubi are rather uncommon, as are his depictions of fairies. The Swedish theologian Nathan Söderblom argued:

The essence of religion is submission and trust. The essence of magic is an audacious self-glorification. Magic knows no bounds to its power; religion, in the proper sense, begins when man feels his impotence in the face of a power which fills him with awe and dread...Magic is thus in direct opposition to the spirit of religion.¹⁸²

Gerald seems to see beyond this oppositional point-of-view, at least at times, and comes across as very modern in his thinking. Modern historians of religion and anthropologists now reject a dichotomy between religion and magic, as all religions contain magical elements and both see the Universe as an entity which is essentially alive.¹⁸³ Gerald was a product of a culture where magic and religion had been fused since the beginning, and despite his cleric training and classical sense of logic, he could not quite ever separate the two.

¹⁷⁹ *Topographia*, Part II, Chapter 71

¹⁸⁰ Bartlett (2008), p. 112

¹⁸¹ *Opus tertium* 26. Brewer (ed.), pp. 99 – 100; in Bartlett (2008), p. 121

¹⁸² Nathan Söderblom, *The Living God*. (London, 1933), p. 36; in Russell (1972), p. 10

¹⁸³ Russell (1972), p. 10

CHAPTER FOUR

WEIRD AND WONDERFUL CREATURES

BIZARRE FAUNA OF IRELAND AND WALES

In the medieval world there was a tripartite division of sentient creatures; angels, humans, and animals:

Tres quipped vitals spiritus creavit omnipotens Deus: unum qui carne non tegitur; alium qui carne tegitur, sed non cum carne moritur; tertium qui carne tegitur et cum carne moritur.¹⁸⁴

Again and again in the literature of the Middle Ages one encounters the concepts of hybridity and metamorphosis, which concerned the blurring of the latter two categories. (The previous chapter dealt with some examples of the first category, as angels and demons were definitionally identical.) Gerald, fascinated as he was “by ruptures in nature’s regularity,”¹⁸⁵ included many tales that dealt with the thorny issues of hybridity and metamorphosis. Some scholars, such as Bernard of Clairvaux, saw humanity itself as hybrid and Christ as the hybrid of hybrids,¹⁸⁶ so the concept was not universally a bad thing. Aside from their allegorical and metaphoric uses, they were also incredibly entertaining. Perhaps the most distinctive and well known tale that Gerald used is that of the Wolves of Ulster, which may be one of the earliest extant European werewolf tales. It is also one of Gerald’s most confused vignettes, maybe because Gerald seems to be more at home with the concept of hybridity rather than the idea of metamorphosis.¹⁸⁷ The idea of metamorphosis, of humans transforming into animals, is as old as humanity itself, and fills countless legends and mythological tales.¹⁸⁸ The romance of the werewolf has extended further than other creatures, enduring even today where it remains a staple of popular culture. There is a practical answer for this:

The wolf himself is one of the most widely diffuse of animals. Like his brother, the dog, he shares with man the ability to live and thrive in nearly all parts of the earth. Whenever man, in his wanderings, has penetrated there he has found, and fought, his ancient enemy.¹⁸⁹

Perhaps because of this universality the wolf was commonly used as an artistic avatar of the Devil in the Middle Ages¹⁹⁰ and also as a symbol of heresy.¹⁹¹ Taken simply it tells of a couple

¹⁸⁴ ‘God created three kinds of living spirit: one which is not enclosed in flesh; another, which is enclosed in flesh but does not die with the flesh; a third which is enclosed in flesh and dies with the flesh.’ Gregory the Great, *Dialogi* 4. 3, ed. Adalbert de Vogüé (3 vols., Sources chrétiennes 251, 260, 265, 1978 – 80), vo. 265, pp. 22 – 4 (*Patrologia latina* 77: 321). In, Bartlett (2008), p. 72

¹⁸⁵ Bynum (2005), p. 29

¹⁸⁶ Bynum (2005), pp. 158 - 159

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ Kirby Flower Smith, ‘An Historical Study of the Werewolf in Literature’, *PMLA*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (1894), pp. 1 – 42, p. 1

¹⁸⁹ Smith (1894), p. 2

who have fallen from grace (symbolically represented by their transformation into wolves) and their quest for redemption. However, the tale has a multitude of layers and meanings and reveals a lot about Gerald the man:

About three years before the coming of Lord John into Ireland, it happened that a priest, journeying from Ulster towards Meath, spent the night in a wood on the borders of Meath. He was staying up beside a fire which he had prepared for himself under the leafy branches of a tree, and had for company only a little boy, when a wolf came up to them and immediately broke into these words: 'Do not be afraid! Do not fear! Do not worry! There is nothing to fear!'

They were completely astounded and in great consternation. The wolf then said some things about God that seemed reasonable. The priest called on him and adjured him by the omnipotent God and faith in the Trinity not to harm them and to tell them what kind of creature he was, who, although in the form of a beast, could speak human words. The wolf gave a Catholic answer in all things and at length added:

'We are natives of Ossory. From there every seven years, because of the imprecation of a certain saint, namely the abbot Natalis, two persons, a man and a woman, are compelled to go into exile not only from their territory but also from their bodily shape. They put off the form of man completely and put on the form of wolf. When the seven years are up, and if they have survived, two others take their place in the same way, and the first pair returns to their former country and nature.

'My companion in this pilgrimage is not far from here and seriously ill. Please give her in her last hour the solace of the priesthood in bringing to her the revelation of the divine mercy.'

This is what he said, and the priest, full of fear, followed him as he went before him to a certain tree not far away. In the hollow of the tree the priest saw a she-wolf groaning and grieving like a human being, even though her appearance was that of a beast. As soon as she saw him she welcomed him in a human way, and then gave thanks also to God that in her last hour he had granted her such consolation. She then received from the hands of the priest all the last rites duly performed up to the last communion. This too she eagerly requested and implored him to complete his good act by giving her the viaticum. The priest insisted that he did not have it with him, but the wolf, who in the meantime had gone a little distance away, came back again and pointed out to him a little wallet, containing a manual and consecrated hosts, which the priest according to the custom of his country carried about with him, hanging from his neck, on his travels. He begged him not to deny to them in any way the gift and help of God, destined for their aid by divine providence. To remove all doubt he pulled all the skin off the she-wolf from the head down to the navel, folding it back with his paw as if it were a hand. And immediately the shape of an old woman, clear to be seen, appeared. At that, the priest, more through terror than reason, communicated her as she had earnestly demanded, and she then devoutly received the sacrament. Afterwards the skin which had been removed by the he-wolf resumed its former position.

When all this had taken place – more in equity than with proper procedure – the wolf showed himself to them to be a man rather than a beast. He shared the fire with them during the whole of the night, and when morning came he led them over a great distance of the wood, and showed them the surest way on their journey. When they parted he gave many thanks to the priest for the benefit he had conferred upon him, and promised to give him much more tangible evidence of his gratitude, if the Lord should call him back from the exile in which he was, and of which he had now completed two thirds.

¹⁹⁰ Russell (1972), p. 105

¹⁹¹ James Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art*. Harper and Row (NY, 1974, 1979), p. 343

Almost two years later I happened to be passing through Meath where the bishop of that region had called a synod. He had also summoned the neighbouring bishops and abbots so that, advised by their counsel, he might more clearly see what he should do in the matter recounted and which he had learned on the confession of the priest. When he heard that I was going through those parts, he sent two of his clerics to me, asking me to come in person, if I could, to discuss so serious a matter. If, however, I could not come, I was at least to indicate my view in writing. When I had heard the whole account (which I had, as a matter of fact. Heard already from others) in due order from them, and since I could not be present because of urgent business, I gave them the benefit at least of my advice in writing. The bishop and synod agreed with it, and sent the priest to the Pope with his documents, in which were given an account of the affair and the priest's confession, and which were sealed with the seals of the bishops and abbots that were present.¹⁹²

Caroline Walker Bynum explores the story of the wolves of Ulster in some depth in *Metamorphosis and Identity* and attributes Gerald's motivations for its inclusion as philosophical.¹⁹³ In her opinion Gerald is simply discussing the concept of what it means for something to become something else.¹⁹⁴ Gerald revised this tale several times and Bynum points out that these revisions consist mainly of "philosophical ruminations on the nature of change."¹⁹⁵ Gerald's original addition was political in nature, with reference to Leviticus and Ecclesiasticus, and "a pattern of repeated decline as nation replaces nation in world history."¹⁹⁶ Gerald's next revision was longer and more complex, as he replaces the theme of political failure through moral decline with an analysis of the wolves' metamorphosis as "one type of transformation among many."¹⁹⁷ It begins with an analogy between the wolves and the hybridity of Christ:

It cannot be disputed, but must be believed with the most unerring faith, that divine nature took on (*assumpisse*) human nature for the salvation of the world; while here, at God's bidding, to exhibit his power and righteous judgment, by no less a miracle human nature took on that of a wolf.¹⁹⁸

He vacillates between concepts of hybridity (the conjugation of incompatibles) and masquerade (an enduring of nature despite the change of skin or clothing), both conceptualized in a sense of non-change. However, Gerald is also asserting that "miracles can be metamorphoses."¹⁹⁹ There is of course a strong link between wolves and shape shifting with ancient Celtic pagan beliefs:

The identification of men or gods with animals is one of the most common elements of religion and myth. Totemism, in which the members of a social group identify themselves with a particular animal, is a familiar phenomenon. The gods of Egypt, of Greece and Rome, and of the Celts and Teutons were often theriomorphic. The idea is that something may have all the appearances of an animal yet really be a person or god. Though men-beasts appear throughout mythic literature, Harry Levin in the *Gates of Horn* (New York, 1963) demonstrates the distinction between great, wild, and holy animals like lions or wolves and tame, weak animals like cats or toads. Witches dominated weak, familiar spirits in the form of domesticated animals; but when they changed their own shapes, they chose the forms of wolves or other fierce animals in order to increase their own powers. This is the

¹⁹² *Topographia Hibernica*, ch. 52, part II, pp. 69 - 72

¹⁹³ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*. Zone Books (NY, 2005), p. 15

¹⁹⁴ Bynum (2005), p. 16

¹⁹⁵ Robert Mills, 'Jesus as Monster', in Bildhauer/Mills (2003), pp.28 – 54, p. 33

¹⁹⁶ Bynum (2005), p. 16

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ Mills (2003), p. 33

¹⁹⁹ Bynum (2005), p. 17

origin of the werewolf motif. The were-wolf is literally a man-wolf (AS. *wer*: man). The concept is more Teutonic than Mediterranean, and the Latin *gerulphus* derives from *werewolf*. Modern French *loup-garou* is a pleonasm literally meaning “wolf-man-wolf.”²⁰⁰

The wolves here can also be seen in terms of the ‘Other’, existing within “an unproblematic body to define oneself against.”²⁰¹ We can see a correlation with the cynocephalus (dog-heads) which were a common motif during the Middle Ages. These strange creatures, with the head of a canine yet the body of a human, represented unreason and animality,²⁰² which we can interpret as paganism. St Christopher was supposed to have been a cynocephalus who acquired language on his conversion to Christianity. As Cohen points out:

The cynocephalus is monstrous because of its hybridity. Human and canine affects freely play across its species-mingling flesh, marking it as alien. Miscegenation made corporeal, he has no secure place in a Christian identity structure generated around a technology of exclusion. A category violator, the monster must be marginalized to keep the system pure.²⁰³

I am inclined to read the story of the wolves of Ulster primarily as a parable on redemption and the conversion of pagans. The actual pelt that covered the old woman was very thin and easily removed, and served as a metaphor for Celtic cultural identity. Perhaps there is also a hint of the keenness with which Gerald felt his rejection as the bishop-elect of St David’s by the king because of his Welshness. The wolves are initially rejected by the priest because of their animalistic appearance, so too was Gerald denied because of ingrained bias towards the Welsh and a perception of him as the ‘Other’. In the tale we also have a statement about the civilization of some regions of Ireland. In the *Expugnatio* Gerald talks of Duvenald, a prince of Ossory, and his barbaric behaviour towards prisoners.²⁰⁴ Perhaps it is a coincidence that the wolves originated in this region; personally I think not.

Hybridity was a constantly reoccurring theme in Gerald’s work; one could say that he seemed a little obsessed by it. In Part II of the *Topographia* we have a woman with a beard (chapter 53), and a man that was half an ox and half a man as well as another that was half a man and half an ox (chapter 54), I’m not quite sure how one distinguishes between the two but there is apparently a crucial difference. This chapter also includes the offspring of a cow and a man. There is also brief mention of a cow that was also partially stag. These can be interpreted as examples of a midpoint in change, a hybrid being both of its composite parts, yet also neither as it something else entirely. But Gerald is not discussing change here, he is expounding on the idea of things being neither one-nor-the-other and we see his own discordant sense of self fully exposed. Although Gerald seems to be rather ambivalent about demons and demonic/human relations, he is nothing of the sort about animal/human sex or even interspecies animal sex. We could equate

²⁰⁰ Russell (1972), p. 55

²⁰¹ Cohen (1999), p. 133

²⁰² Sarah Salih, ‘Idols and Simulacra: Paganity, Hybridity and Representation in *Mandeville’s Travels*,’; in Bildhauer/Mills (eds.) (2003), pp. 113 – 133, p. 125

²⁰³ Cohen (1999), p. 134

²⁰⁴ *Expugnatio*, Book I, ch. IV, p. 16

his thoughts to Tertullian's "all things that are not of God are perverse,"²⁰⁵ but they run so much deeper. He dedicates two chapters explicitly to the subject; the goat that had intercourse with a woman and the lion that loved a woman,²⁰⁶ as well as the chapters detailing the previously mentioned creatures where such behaviour is most definitely implied. The monstrous beings that populate his narratives are the evidence of sinful behaviour.²⁰⁷ Somewhat surprisingly, considering the breadth of the monstrous he discusses, Gerald saves his greatest disgust for a dog that was impregnated by a monkey:

Again in our time near here [Chester] had a litter by a monkey and produced puppies which were ape-like in front but more like a dog behind. When the warden of the soldiers' quarters saw them, he was amazed at these prodigies of nature. Their deformed and hybrid bodies revolted this country bumpkin. He killed the whole lot of them out of hand with a stick. His master was very annoyed when he learned what had happened, and the man was punished.²⁰⁸

Gerald's reaction to this incident is visceral to say the least, and he shows far more revulsion than for the ox-man or horse-stag.²⁰⁹ The dog was a native and domesticated creature, whereas the monkey was alien to the British Isles, and also represented heresy and paganism in the early Middle Ages.²¹⁰ Simians were also seen to "symbolize the baser forces, darkness or unconscious activity."²¹¹ He considers it as debased as the goat/female coupling, and degrades the woman herself to the level of a beast as well:

How unworthy and unspeakable! How reason succumbs so outrageously to sensuality! That the lord of the brutes, losing the privileges of his high estate, should descend to the level of the brutes, when the rational submits itself to such a shameful commerce with a brute animal!²¹²

Interestingly Gerald does not place the blame on the goat, as it is subjugated by man and thus an innocent party in the episode. My argument is that the goat is merely symbolic, and represents the subjugated – like the Welsh or the Irish – and is a metaphor for exactly the sort of mixed relationships that produced Gerald himself. There is a deeply personal note in these tales of hybridity and, to a lesser extent, metamorphosis, as they give voice to how Gerald saw himself:

...a 'self-conscious hybrid', a 'mongrel', half-Celtic and half-Norman, in a world that cast a highly prejudiced eye on all things Celtic.²¹³

²⁰⁵ Tertullian, "On the Pallium", in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Alexander Roberts & James Donaldson (eds.) vol. 4 (Buffalo, 1885), 8; in R Howard Bloch, 'Medieval Misogyny,' *Representations*, No. 20, Special Issue: Misogyny, Misandry, and Misanthropy. (Autumn, 1987), pp. 1 – 24, p. 1

²⁰⁶ *Topographia*, Part 2, ch. 56, 57

²⁰⁷ Asa Simon Mittman, 'The Other Close at Hand: Gerald of Wales and the 'Marvels of the West.' In Bildhauer/Mills (eds.) (2003), pp. 97 – 112, p. 102

²⁰⁸ *Itinerarium*, Book II, chapter 11, pp. 199 - 200

²⁰⁹ Asa Simon Mittman, 'The Other Close at Hand: Gerald of Wales and the 'Marvels of the West.' In Bildhauer/Mills (eds.) (2003), pp. 97 – 112, p. 103

²¹⁰ Hall (1979), p. 22

²¹¹ Cirlot (1995), p. 212

²¹² *Topographia*, Part 2, ch. 56

²¹³ Bynum (2005), p. 151; in Mittman (2003), p. 104

Gerald had no place where he was truly accepted. In Wales he frequently met with anti-Norman prejudice and at the Angevin court he felt just as much an outsider:

Whatever esteem my gravity of manner, literary ability and hard work could bring me was taken away by that suspect, dangerous, hateful name – Wales.²¹⁴

This conflicted sense of self finds ultimate expression at the end of the *Descriptio* where he first details how Wales can be conquered and then how the Welsh can repel such an invasion.²¹⁵ Although clearly written as a classical argument and counter-argument, it is obviously more personal:

I have set out the case for the English with considerable care and in some detail. I myself am descended from both peoples, and it seems only fair that I should now put the opposite point of view. I therefore turn to the Welsh..., and propose to give them some brief, but I hope effective, instruction in the art of resistance.²¹⁶

On the surface these creatures can be viewed in quite simplistic terms; pagans were often imagined as animals by Christian writers.²¹⁷ These results of hybridity represent imbrications cultural boundaries, whether temporal, geographic or bodily; monsters are attempts to construct marginal identities that emerge.²¹⁸ However, hybridity and metamorphosis violate categories very differently. Hybridity has forces “forces contradictory or incompatible categories to coexist and serve as commentary” on each other.²¹⁹ Metamorphosis breaches categories and breaks them down.²²⁰ In Gerald we have such an example of hybridity and how seemingly incompatible cultural forces contradict each other and result in an inner schism of self. The examples touched upon in this chapter provide the most illuminating insight into the man who wrote them. We see his seething resentment on how his external Welshness is the basis on which he is judged, and his deep inner self-loathing at his hybrid nature. Gerald’s often cocky arrogance may have merely been a coping mechanism for his own feelings of inadequacy and self-hatred. As Bernard of Clairvaux saw, “we understand the nature of white and black each more clearly if both are present,”²²¹ and “moreover, hybrids both destabilize and reveal the world.”²²² By Gerald’s own hybridity he reveals more and he understands more, which might perhaps explain his brilliance. It did not however give him any measure of self acceptance or any great degree of inner peace.

²¹⁴ Robert Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales, 1146 – 1223*. Clarendon Press (Oxford, 1982), p. 17; in Mittman (2003), p. 105

²¹⁵ Mittman (2003), p. 105

²¹⁶ *Itinerarium*, Book II, ch. 10

²¹⁷ Cohen (1999), p. 133

²¹⁸ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, ‘Preface’ in Cohen (ed.) *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*. University of Minnesota Press (Minneapolis, 1996), pp. viii – xiii, p. ix; in Salih (2003), pp. 113 - 114

²¹⁹ Bynum (2005), p. 31

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

²²¹ Bynum (2005), p. 160

²²² *Ibid.*

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION: THE MEDIEVAL 'OTHER'

Writers always write from a personal perspective and so it is no surprise that the underlying motif in all of Gerald's ethnographic works is the concept of the 'Other' and its relation to his own conflicted sense of identity. While on the surface these are rather typical medieval travel narratives, one can also view them as journeys through Gerald's own internal landscape. Mittman adroitly says, "if Britain was, in its own eyes, geographically and culturally marginal, then Gerald was doubly so."²²³ Gerald simply did not fit in. He was a hybrid who felt an innate sense of inferiority because of it yet, because of his personality and unabashed egoism, could not seem to compromise and therefore plowed his own, if turbulent, path. In his own eyes he was an abhorrence,²²⁴ who found expression for his personal turmoil through his work. For arrogance we can read pain. Bartlett states that whether in Paris, Rome, Ireland, or Wales, Gerald "never lacked a cultural context with which he could identify."²²⁵ I disagree; although he could relate on a superficial level to all of these contexts, he lacked a deep rooted sense of belonging in these places because in actuality he belonged everywhere and yet nowhere.

Traditionally, the 'Other' was geographically removed from the narrator in medieval texts; places that were far enough away as to allow for fantastical tales to be told and not questioned. Although we think of Ireland and Wales as physically proximate to England today, in the Middle Ages they were exotic and unknown. Britain itself was marginal and removed from the mainstream in the early medieval period. Gildas wrote in the sixth century that Britain laid "almost under the north pole of the world."²²⁶ The British Isles were therefore conceptually connected to all the marginal regions of the world, including the 'monstrous' East.²²⁷ At the end of Part One of the *Topographia* Gerald spends several chapters extolling the virtues of the West over the East.

All the elements in the East, even though they were created for the help of man, threaten his wretched life, deprive him of health, and finally kill him. If you put your naked foot upon the ground, death is upon you; if you sit upon marble without taking care, death is upon you; if you drink unmixed water, or merely smell dirty water with your nostrils, death is upon you; if you uncover your head to feel the breeze the better, it may affect you by either its heat or coldness – but in any case, death is upon you. The heavens terrify you with their thunder and threaten you with their lightening. The sun with its burning rays makes you uncomfortable. And if you take more food than is right,

²²³ Asa Simon Mittman, "The Other Close at Hand: Gerald of Wales and the 'Marvels of the West.'" In Bildhauer/Mills (eds.) (2003), pp. 97 – 112, p. 97

²²⁴ Mittman (2003), p. 104

²²⁵ Bartlett (2006), p. 18

²²⁶ Mittman (2003), p. 97

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

death is at the gate; if you take your wine unmixed with water, death is at the gate; if you do not hold back your hand from food long before you are satisfied, death is at the gate.²²⁸

This representative East was constructed in order to position it against Europe and the West, and was part of the plan to portray Islam as “just a misguided version of Christianity.”²²⁹ Britain and Ireland, with their still apparent paganism, served the same purpose. The East was a place of monsters and strange phenomena, and allowed Europe to construct itself in terms of civility, so too were the northerly marginal areas of Europe. The proximity of the ‘Other’, whether as a literal geographic place or as a constructed form, “is a formal necessity to keep in motion the identity-giving process of its continued exclusion.”²³⁰

Gerald has shifted the paradigm of the Other in the *Topographia*. He talks of Ireland’s size compared to that of Britain, positioning as inferior and in subjugation to the latter. Gerald needed to be a cultural outsider in order to “gaze inwards and finally see Britain as central”²³¹ rather than peripheral. Bartlett writes:

It is as if there were three concentric circles: One, our world, where there is no need for generalizing description, since everything is taken for granted; the second, outer ring where the barbarians live, peoples whose strange customs prompt us to record them; the third, outermost ring, where the principles of order dissolve and all our fears, fantasies, and projections become real.²³²

We can also model the natural and supernatural worlds in such a way: with the inner circle being the natural world which we can understand; the second circle being wonder which is explainable although strange and sometimes confusing; and finally the outermost circle inhabited by the marvelous and miraculous, where our projections become real. Monsters and the supernatural were so popular because the medieval audience had an appetite for them; they were not merely the Other but also the Self. Gerald’s audience particularly personally identified with them because they were fellow *mearcstapan*, border-walkers on the margins of civility.²³³ Gerald’s own identification with his hybrids and fairy worlds reflected his audience’s own. The Welsh started to define themselves as *Cymry* ‘Welsh’ rather than *Brytaniaid* ‘Britons’ in the early to mid twelfth century.²³⁴ The Welsh deliberately marginalized themselves so as to distinguish themselves against the Anglo-Norman hegemony and create a unique sense of identity. Gerald does have complimentary things to say about the Welsh, and also goes out of his way to point out some of the virtues which Ireland possesses²³⁵ (likewise Wales), yet both are also depicted as wild, uncivilized and clearly imbued with all the classic traits of the ‘Other’ as Gerald positions

²²⁸ *Topographia*, Part I, ch. 28, p. 54

²²⁹ Edward W Said, *Orientalism*. Random House (New York, 1979), p. 61

²³⁰ Cohen (1999), p. 134

²³¹ Mittman (2003), p. 106

²³² Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales*, p. 145; in Mittman (2003), p. 106

²³³ Mittman (1999), pp. 105 - 6

²³⁴ Huw Pryce, ‘British or Welsh?’ National Identity in Twelfth-Century Wales,’ *The Historical Review*, Vol. 116, No. 468 (Sept., 2001), pp. 775 – 801, p. 782

²³⁵ *Topographia*, Part 1, ch. 26

himself as an observer. Monstrousness is prevalent; in the third part he talks of the huge numbers of the Irish who have physical deformities:

Moreover, I have never seen among any other people so many blind by birth, so many lame, so many maimed in body, and so many suffering from some natural defect. Just as those that are well formed are magnificent and second to none, so those that are badly formed have not their like elsewhere. And just as who are kindly fashioned by nature turn out fine, so those that are without nature's blessing turn out in a horrible way.

And it is not surprising if nature sometimes produces such beings contrary to her ordinary laws when dealing with a people that is adulterous, incestuous, unlawfully conceived and born, outside the law, and shamefully abusing nature herself in spiteful and horrible practices. It seems a just punishment from God that those who do not look to him with the interior light of the mind, should often grieve in being deprived of the gift of the light that is bodily and external.²³⁶

Here again we come back to the monstrous and concepts of outsiders in society. These blind and lame individuals are akin to the ox-man and the bearded lady, and exist on the same continuum of the unnatural. He also discusses the unnatural sexual practices of the Welsh (incest and homosexuality) and curiously mentions incest in the same passage as the abuse of church livings by passing them on from father to son. The sin of Welsh priests by fathering children is clearly Gerald's issue here and falls back into his obsession with unnatural sex, or perhaps sex in general. I think that Gerald felt so apart from his fellow human beings that normal human desires and emotions frightened him. Like all repressed emotions he was simultaneously attracted and repelled and his vision became twisted and skewed. He projects this fear onto a broader discussion on hybridity. Hybridity was not just a discourse on the results of unnatural behaviour but also on his own fears and repression.

Gerald existed on the margins, yet also in the centre. He was a tale of contradictions which never found a conclusion or an acceptable space in which to exist. He bound up all his inner conflicts with his subject matter and took the reader on a journey of both internal and external discovery. He had contemporaries but none have quite rooted so deeply in a nation's psyche. Despite living eight hundred years ago he still has relevance and his words still resonate. He had a way with words which few of his fellow writers had and one imagines that, if he were alive today, he would still be plying his trade as a wordsmith in some capacity and still offending, entertaining and challenging his readers and listeners.

ELIZABETH HEFTY

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2010

²³⁶ *Topographia*, Part 3, ch. 109

APPENDIX ONE
WORKS OF GERALD OF WALES

Surviving Works:

Topographia Hibernica ("Topography of Ireland", 1188)

Expugnatio Hibernica ("Conquest of Ireland")

Itinerarium Cambriæ ("Journey through Wales", 1191)

Gamma Ecclesiastica ("Jewel of the church")

De Instructione Principum ("Education of a prince")

De Rebus a se gestis ("Autobiography")

Vita S. Davidis II episcopi Menevensis

Descriptio Cambriæ ("Description of Wales", 1194)

Vita Galfridi Arch. Eboracensis

Symbolum Electorum

Invectionum Libellus

Speculum Ecclesiæ ("Mirror of the Church")

Vita S. Remigii ("Life of St. Remigius")

Vita S. Hugonis ("Life of St. Hugh")

Vita S. Davidis archiepiscopi Menevensis ("Life of St. David")

Vita S. Ethelberti ("Life of St. Ethelbert")

Epistola ad Stephanum Langton

De Grialdo Archidiacono Menevensi

De Libris a se scriptis

Catalogus brevior librorum

Retractationes

De jure Menevensis Ecclesiae ("Rights and privileges of the Church of St David's")

Lost Works:

Duorum speculum

Vita sancti Karadoci ("Life of St Caradoc")

De fidei fructu fideique defectu

Cambriae mappa

APPENDIX TWO

LITERARY CONTEMPORARIES OF GIRALDUS CAMBRENSIS

Alanus de Insulis (c. 1128 – c. 1202)

Andreas Capellanus (1174 – 86)

Anglo-Saxon Chronicles (60 BCE – 1154)

Bede (c. 673 – 735)

Caradoc of Llancarvan (1129 – 60)

Etienne de Rouen (c. 1167)

Geoffrey of Monmouth (c. 1136)

Gervase of Tilbury (c. 1211)

Gildas (c. 540)

Giraldus Cambrensis (c. 1147 – c. 1223)

Guillaume de Rennes (c. 1235)

Hector Boece (c. 1465 – c. 1536)

Helinand de Friedmont (c. 1170 – 1230)

Henry of Huntington (c. 1154)

John of Fordun, cont. Walter Bower (c. 1360)

Lambert de Saint-Omer (c. 1120)

Nennius (c. 800)

Ralph Higden (1300 – 1363)

Richard of Cirencester (d. c. 1401)

Robert de Torigny (c. 1152)

Roger of Wendover, cont. Matthew Paris (d. 1236)

Saxo Grammaticus (c. 1188 – 1201)

Vincent de Beavais (c. 1190 – 1264)

Walter Map (c. 1190)

William of Malmesbury (*c.* 1125)

William of Newburgh (*c.* 1136 – *c.* 1198)

Source: Norma Lorre Goodrich, *King Arthur*. Harper and Row (NY) 1986, p. 345

APPENDIX THREE

GERALD'S PHILOSOPHY ON WRITING

In the second preface to *Descriptio Cambriae* Gerald describes his philosophy on writing:

Many indeed remonstrate against my proceedings, and those particularly who call themselves my friends insist that, in consequence of my violent attachment to study, I pay no attention to the concerns of the world, or to the interests of my family; and that, on this account, I shall experience a delay in my promotion to worldly dignities; that the influence of authors, both poets and historians, has long since ceased; that the respect paid to literature vanished with literary princes; and that in these degenerate days very different paths lead to honours and opulence.

I allow all this, I readily allow it, and acquiesce in the truth. For the unprincipled and covetous attach themselves to the court, the churchmen to their books, and the ambitious to the public

offices, but as every man is under the influence of some darling passion, so the love of letters and the study of eloquence have from my infancy had for me peculiar charms of attraction. Impelled

by this thirst for knowledge, I have carried my researches into the mysterious works of nature farther than the generality of my contemporaries, and for the benefit of posterity have rescued from oblivion the remarkable events of my own times. But this object was not to be secured without an indefatigable, though at the same time an agreeable, exertion; for an accurate investigation of every particular is attended with much difficulty. It is difficult to produce an orderly account of the investigation and discovery of truth; it is difficult to preserve from the beginning to the end a connected relation unbroken by irrelevant matter; and it is difficult to render the narration no less elegant in the diction, than instructive in its matter, for in prosecuting the series of events, the choice of happy expressions is equally perplexing, as the search after them painful. Whatever is written requires the most intense thought, and every expression should be carefully polished before it be submitted to the public eye; for, by exposing itself to the examination of the present and of future ages, it must necessarily undergo the criticism not only of the acute, but also of the dissatisfied, reader. Words merely uttered are soon forgotten, and the admiration or disgust which they occasioned is no more; but writings once published are never lost, and remain as lasting memorials either of the glory or of the disgrace of the author.

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